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THE PERFUME of the VIOLET

BY

FRANK
HOWARD HOWE.



ILLUSTRATED

CHICAGO:
MORRILL, HIGGINS & CO., PUBLISHERS.

IDYLWILD SERIES. Vol. I, No. 12, June 20, 1892. Issued weekly. Annual Subscription, \$26.00.
Entered in the Postoffice at Chicago as second-class matter.



"SHE MADE NO ANSWER, BUT OPENED THE DOOR AND PLACED ONE FOOT ON THE CARRIAGE STEP."

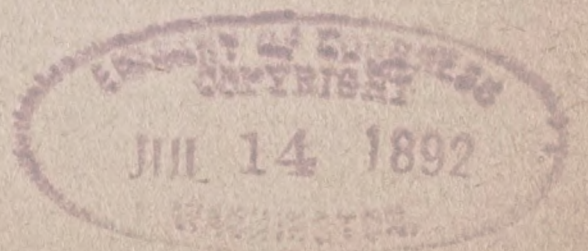
THE PERFUME OF THE VIOLET

Adapted from the French of Dubret Le Laforest

BY

FRANK HOWARD HOWE

CHICAGO
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1892



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THE PERFUME OF THE VIOLET

CHAPTER I

Monsieur Louis Chazeau, a rising member of the bar in the town of Noutron in Perigord, had just finished an elaborate argument before the city court, which had attracted the attention and favorable comment of several of the elder lawyers present. Flushed with satisfaction and with the exertions he had been making, the young barrister had just resumed his seat and the court was about to take a recess, when a messenger placed in Chazeau's hand a telegram which he straightway opened and read. It was as follows:

“PARIS.

“Mademoiselle Elise dead. Little Colette all alone. Come.

“ANGELA REBOUL, *concierge*.”

The agitation displayed by the attorney

after perusing this message was so marked as to attract the attention of many in the court-room and curious glances were cast after the young lawyer as he rose, nervously gathered together his books and papers, and hurriedly left the room.

It was the month of December, 1864. The weather was freezing cold and the frost nipped the bare fingers of the young man as he walked along under the leafless branches of the linden trees that lined the street, holding the telegram in his hand and confusedly reading over and over again the message which it contained. The four letters "d-e-a-d" and the four words "little Colette all alone" were written in a larger script than the rest of the message, as though the awkward hand of some new telegraph clerk had broadened and thickened them in order to load them the more heavily with sorrowful meaning and to make them tell as forcibly as possible the story of death and misfortune which they contained. The fierce winter wind shrieked through the leafless branches of the trees above which the leaden, somber-colored clouds

were rapidly hurrying. In the stiffening fingers of the young lawyer the little slip of paper rattled, rustled and seemed to moan in unison with the dirge that was sounding in his own heart.

Monsieur Chazeau walked rapidly up the street. His usually calm bearing had disappeared altogether. His hat, which he usually wore precisely set on the top of his head, was now tilted carelessly back. His black hair was all awry and his whiskers even had a disheveled look. His cravat had slipped around under one ear, and his face wore such an anxiously unhappy look that the proprietor and several habitués of the Café de la Rotonde came out on the balcony to look at him as he hurried by.

"Hello! Look at Chazeau. What a mouth he is making! Wonder what's the matter."

"Looks as if he had been crying. See how pale he is."

"He's been making a speech in court and has lost his case."

"Look! look! Why he's almost running. Perhaps he has gone mad."

A snarling voice from within, here interrupted the gossips with the information, delivered in a high key:

"It's freezing cold in here."

Whereupon the others re-entered the house and, closing the window, gathered around the stove in the drinking-room.

"Bright young man, that Chazeau," was the comment of the proprietor, Laborde.

"A deal of talent—a deal of talent," said Father Voisin, a little old gentleman who wore large gold-bowed spectacles. "He's beginning to get the ear of the court. One of these days he'll make his mark, you'll see. I wonder what has happened to him to-day."

"Ah, to be sure, what has happened to him to-day?" was the general query echoed by the company gathered about the stove. But no one was found to answer it.

Meanwhile Chazeau continued his rapid course up the long street. Several ladies of his acquaintance, who passed him without receiving the usual greeting, turned and looked wonderingly after him. What! Could that be Monsieur Chazeau with his hat tilted

so carelessly over one ear? He was ordinarily so punctilious and so correct in his deportment and now he was rushing along up the street, paying no attention to those he might meet, looking for all the world like a mad rustic, rather than the well-behaved gentleman he was supposed to be.

"Is he drunk?"

"Is he demented?"

"Well, I like his impudence."

"The scamp, he didn't notice my bow."

These were some of the comments that might have been wafted to the young attorney's ears had he stayed to listen. But he hastened on. At the corner of the Rue des Cordiers was the pharmacy of his friend Sireyjol. Here, it was his custom almost every day to stop and chat with the worthy druggist. Sireyjol now, seeing his crony go by, tapped on the window to attract his attention, and was vastly indignant at not receiving even a gesture in reply. At last the lawyer reached the door of his house. There he crushed down into his pocket the telegram which he had carried until then in his hand,

and, after making some slight attempt to smooth his crumpled array, raised the knocker and rapped briskly for admission.

Mariette, the chambermaid, had gone out on an errand; Margaret, the old cook, was engaged in preparing a chicken for the oven; Ferdinand was splitting wood out in the barn; so it happened that Madame Chazeau herself came to the door.

At sight of her husband's face, which she had seen a few hours before all smiling and happy, the young wife perceived that something unpleasant had happened. She steadied herself, not so much to support the shock of the bad news as to animate the courage of the husband whom she loved devotedly.

The lawyer said never a word as he passed his wife and entered the hall-way. Tremblingly, she asked him:

"Is your case finished?"

"Not yet."

"How warm you are! The drops of perspiration stand out on your forehead. Don't stay here. You'll catch cold. Hurry into the dining-room, dear. There's a good fire there."

She took his portfolio of papers from him and drew him gently within. The lawyer followed her confusedly, vainly trying to conceal his agitation. His wife seated him in an easy-chair before the dining-room fire and kissed him fondly. But she forebore to question him. Just then little Renee, who had been watching Margaret's operations with the chicken, scratched at the dining-room door, calling:

"Papa, papa."

She was admitted and at once crept into her father's arms.

"Papa!"

"My darling little girl!" The mother contemplated them both as they caressed each other. She hoped that the child's kisses would have the effect of driving away the careworn look from the man's brow. But it did not. Presently the lawyer drew the little girl's arms from about his neck and set her gently upon the floor.

"Go back to Margaret now, please, Renee darling," he said.

The little one toddled off, contentedly.

When he was once more alone with his wife, Chazeau said to her:

"Anna, I must go to Paris at once—this evening."

"Is it bad news?"

"Yes."

"May I know?"

"No, I must not tell you anything. I cannot tell you the truth and I am not good at lying. Better—"

"Better for me to know nothing—to weep and suffer alone here while you are far away from me?"

He hesitated a moment, then said:

"Yes, better so."

She came and stood before him.

"I am your wife," she said, simply, "and if it is your duty to keep silence, it is mine to make you speak. I do not care what your sorrow is; I wish to share it with you; I want my part of it."

A glow of wifely enthusiasm shone in her face and in her great dark eyes. Her whole person seemed to palpitate with the strong desire to share her husband's suffering for

which she pleaded. She was a medium-sized woman, fair and rather plump, with a fine skin, fresh mouth, white teeth and an honest look in her pleasant face. She was of that order of women who most inspire confidence in their husbands. Still Monsieur Chazeau sat with his head bowed upon his hands and maintained a stolid silence. His wife, as she stood over him with that affectionate smile upon her lips which seemed potent to wrest his secret from him, so eloquently did it promise pardon beforehand, appeared more terrible to him in her candid and simple kindness than had the three judges on their bench on the occasion when he had had the honor to first plead before them at the bar.

With a single word he felt that he might forever destroy the confidence of this dearly beloved woman, and dig between them a chasm so deep that the devotion of a lifetime would be insufficient to fill it up.

Should he lie? No, it was too late for lying.

He was angry with himself for the spectacle of grief and despair which he knew he

had presented in the court-room. He accused himself for the feeling of weakness and cowardice that had taken possession of him when reading the telegram from Paris. He felt that he should have kept a mask upon his face and returned home in a pleasant or even lively frame of mind, and then upon some pretext have gone to Paris, and, his duty accomplished, have returned quietly to Noutron. No one but an idiot could have acted otherwise. His wife interrupted his thoughts at this point.

"Your silence does me wrong," she said. "It permits me to imagine a worse misfortune perhaps than that which actually exists."

"But, my dear!" exclaimed Chazeau, earnestly, "believe me, the matter does not concern you at all."

"Very well, I do not insist. How long shall you be gone?"

"Two days."

"Shall you go this evening?"

"Yes. I shall take the seven o'clock train at Thiviers."

"And you haven't spoken to the man yet?"

I will go and hurry up the dinner and pack your portmanteau."

"Thanks."

"Dinner will be ready as soon as you want it."

And Madame Chazeau left the room, subduing, as she went, a strong desire to shed tears. Her husband sat down at his desk and wrote a long despatch to Madame Angela Reboul, No. 71 Rue Cardinal-Lemoine, Paris, in which he said he would arrive the following morning and gave some orders with reference to the obsequies of the Mademoiselle Elise mentioned in the *concierge's* telegram.

Meanwhile Anna had gone to her room. There her grief was permitted to have full play. It was the first unhappiness that had come to the household and it was the harder for the young wife to bear because its cause was a mystery so far as she was concerned. Was Louis ruined? Had he engaged in stock-gambling? Had he lost more than his fortune, his honor? Was it some long-forgotten crime which now rose up and confronted him? Was he running away from her, perhaps?

A thousand wild fancies crossed the imagination of the young wife. She went back and forth between her own room and that of her husband, endeavoring to pack his valise, scattering his clothes and linen here and there, among the furniture, unable to bring her wits to a focus, and possessed by the dread that she was about to look upon the beloved face for the last time—the adored one would never return to her.

Presently she heard steps upon the stairs. Then the dearly loved voice from the doorway pronounced her name.

“Anna!”

“My darling!”

He held his arms out to her and she threw herself into them. The two remained clasped in a close embrace. When they released each other, their faces were wet with tears.

“Anna, I have a confession to make.”

“Louis, you have my pardon in advance, if there is need of pardon.”

Chazeau went straight to the point

“Before our marriage,” he said, “there was—some one else—you understand—in Paris.”

“When you were a student?”

"Yes. She died this morning and she has left a child—a little girl—who is also mine. The child is left all alone."

"Poor little thing!"

Then the maternal instinct took possession of her.

"Louis, we have a daughter. You must not forget her."

"I know, but we are rich, Anna. She can never want. I have thought it my duty to provide a modest competence for—the other one."

"You are right."

"I feared to tell you this because I did not wish to give you pain. I need not tell you that I have never seen Colette's mother since our marriage."

"Is your little one called Colette? What a pretty name! How old is she?"

"Seven years old."

"Three years older than our Renee. Did her mother die—in want?"

"No, I kept her from want. I could do so much without being false to you, could I not?"

Here the sound of the knocker was heard upon the front door.

"It is my mother," said Chazeau; "not a word to her, please."

"Do not fear."

Madame Clorinde, Louis' mother, had been to church. She was a little, bent woman in a black shawl and bonnet, with a thin, sweet face, framed by little gray curls. When her son and his wife descended to her she was in the hall-way with her book of hours in her hand.

"The servant has just told me that you are going to Paris," she said.

"It is true, mother."

"A business matter, I suppose."

The lawyer bowed gravely.

"What have you been crying about?" queried the little old lady, glancing sharply at her son. "Your eyes are all red. And you too, Anna, you have been crying. My daughter, what has happened?"

"Nothing much," said Chazeau, smiling down upon her.

"Tut-tut-tut! You have secrets from your old mother. Come, Anna, what is it?"

"I know nothing, mamma."

Madame Clorinde observed them narrowly

as if she would read the depths of their souls. Then, just as her daughter had done when Chazeau first entered the house, the mother braced herself to meet the coming blow. Her thin old hands seemed to grope about her as if to push away the menacing peril.

"Louis, you are in trouble," she said. "But I won't ask questions. That will only worry you the more. But tell me, does your wife go with you?"

"No, I shall travel too rapidly. I shan't be gone more than three days."

"Take good care of yourself then. The weather is cold. Is your purse well filled? You have been spending a good deal on your farm lately. Wait a moment—I've a little surprise for you."

And the good woman hastened away as fast as her thin old legs would carry her to her chamber.

"Dear old mother," murmured the lawyer, looking after her. "Ah, if she but knew!"

Anna followed her mother-in-law to her room, leaving her husband to finish his preparations for departure.

When the two ladies reappeared there was the chink of gold in the elder one's hand as she placed it in her son's. Anna stole up to him and whispered in his ear:

"We shall have two children, dear. I want you to bring Colette back with you."

Monsieur Chazeau stood petrified at this announcement, with his eyes on the ground.

His wife continued:

"I shall be Colette's mamma. You'll see. I shall love her dearly."

But the attorney's conscience revolted at this. He felt that he ought not to permit his sin to stretch itself out indefinitely. His wife's self-abnegation was sublime but he ought not to take advantage of it to the extent of bringing his unknown child into the family circle. He called on his mother to side with him in defending this decision against his wife. Madame Clorinde, at the outset, had been won over by the sorrowful picture of the poor child's future, which her daughter-in-law had painted, and was disposed to accept her sacrifice. Now she began to take sides with her son in combating his wife's plans. What would

happen if Anna should have reason in the future to regret her kindness.

"You are mistaken, mother," Madam Chazeau declared in response to the elder woman's suggestions. "So long as Colette is kept away from her natural home it will be an ever present reproach to Louis. His heart is so constituted that he will always yearn for the absent and disinherited daughter. He will love her more than the child who is near to him and whose life is bright and happy. Besides, what difference does it make! Colette is the child of the man to whom I have linked my life and whose sufferings I have promised to share. She shall come to us. She will not interfere with Renee's happiness or future. Renee will inherit all that belongs to us and Louis shall provide a marriage portion for Colette out of the earnings of his profession."

"What will Monsieur Rouilhat say?" asked her husband.

"I shall not ask my father for any aid in supporting this small addition to our household expenses," was the wife's prompt response. "Colette must not and shall not stay

alone there in Paris. Seven years old and all alone! Poor little baby!"

Monsieur Chazeau and his mother continued to make a weak resistance, but in the end the young wife was victorious.

"She shall be the child of both of us," she exclaimed triumphantly, when she had at last overcome all their objections.

The carriage was at the door waiting to take the master to the station and Margaret summoned them to dinner. Madame Chazeau took her little child in her arms and covered her face with kisses.

"Darling," she exclaimed, "papa is going to bring you a sister. Won't that be nice?"

But the little girl did not seem to be very much pleased. She got down from her mother's lap and went to tease the cat which was purring near the fireplace. After dinner Monsieur Chazeau took his leave of his family. He held his wife in his arms and, much moved, whispered to her:

"Anna, Anna, you are a saint upon earth. May you never have cause to regret your kindness."

Then he stooped over Renee and the little one, looking up into his face, said:

“You are going to bring me a sister, papa? Oh! I’d much rather have a dolly that can make a noise.”

To the father as he turned away there seemed something prophetic in these careless words of his baby daughter. Would she have reason to remember them in her future life?

CHAPTER II

"When did she die?"

"Yesterday at noon."

"Suddenly?"

"No, sir, no—she had lingered long."

"And suffered much?"

"Yes."

"You should have written me."

"She forbade me to do so, sir."

"Did you carry out my instructions?"

"Yes, sir. They are bringing up the coffin now."

"And the flower pieces?"

"Are in her chamber."

"Where is Colette?"

"In the next house with one of the poor lady's friends."

"Is she a good child?"

"A perfect little jewel, sir."

"Go and get her, and await me here."

"Very well, sir. I shall follow the body to



"THE DEAD WOMAN WAS LAID OUT ON A BED STREWN WITH IMMORTELLES AND WHITE ROSES.

the cemetery, sir. My husband will take my place at the door while I am gone."

"Thank you. You are a good woman."

This conversation was held between Monsieur Chazeau and Madame Angela Reboul, *concierge*, in the room of the latter, at number 71 Rue Cardinal-Lemoine, at Paris, the day after the events mentioned in the last chapter. Louis now ascended the five flights of steps, which led to the chamber where lay the mortal remains of her whom he had known and loved as Elise Dumontheil. The dead woman was laid out on a bed, strewn with immortelles and white roses. In the dim light of the wax-candle could be seen the figures of two women, the hired watchers. The four undertaker's men, who had gone out to a neighboring wine-shop to drink, according to their custom, to the memory of the deceased, could now be heard coming upstairs with the measured tread of those used to carrying heavy burdens between them.

On the entrance of Chazeau the two watchers withdrew into the embrasure of the window. Louis thanked them with a sad

smile and, kneeling before the couch, regarded long and sorrowfully the face of the dead. He thought of their first meeting and of the words of love that had passed between them and of how her young eyes had shone when he breathed his passion in her ear.

There are calm deaths that scarcely seem to make an impression on the faces which they touch. It is with them like the end of a beautiful day, as the Ecclesiast says. They are silent, the eyes are closed, the heart no longer beats, but the face still wears a look of life. One would say that it needed but a word or a slight caress to waken them again. Elise's death slumber was like that. The slow tears followed each other down the cheeks of the former law-student as he gazed upon the marble profile of the dead woman. Presently, one of the watchers approached and murmured:

"Monsieur, it is time to go. They are here."

Chazeau arose, and now the undertaker and his men were ready to perform the last duties. He made a sign with his head; the functionary approached, closed up the coffin and his men

slowly carried it out. The lawyer gave his hand to little Colette, who had, in the meantime, been produced by the *concierge*. They two, the *concierge* and one or two other women, friends of the deceased, made up the little funeral procession.

Upon the return from the cemetery, little Colette, a child of seven years of age and singularly acute intelligence, was told that the strange gentleman was her father, who had come to take her away with him.

"Sir," said the little one, looking scrutinizingly up into Chazeau's face, "if you are my papa why didn't you come before and take care of mamma?"

Chazeau changed countenance in spite of himself and for the moment felt at a loss for a word to say. Madame Reboul came to his assistance.

"Colette," she said, impressively, "there were some wicked people who prevented your papa from coming to Paris any sooner."

The little girl continued to regard her father's face for a moment or two and then, apparently satisfied by what she saw, turned silently away.

At eight o'clock that evening Monsieur Chazeau and his daughter took their places in the train, *en route* for Thiviers. They got something to eat at the Orleans station. But Colette took so little that her father laid in a store of provisions for her consumption on board the train. When they got into their carriage again the lawyer wrapped the child carefully in a warm rug. Colette smiled her thanks. It was the first sign that the strange gentleman of yesterday was being metamorphosed in her mind into the papa of the future.

An old gentleman and lady, half asleep, were the only other occupants of the carriage.

Chazeau asked the little girl if she would like to go to sleep.

"No," she said, "I'd rather talk with you."

They spoke to each other in a low tone. Instinctively and gradually the child nestled toward her father as the winter night spread itself darker and darker over the silent moors across which they were being whirled.

"Colette?"

"Monsieur."

"You will have a grandmamma, too."

"What a happy child I'm going to be!" the little girl exclaimed, with shining eyes. Then she reached up and gave her father a resounding kiss.

Presently, however, in spite of herself, the orphan, doubtless remembering the sorrowful day through which she had just passed, became once more pensive.

"If mamma had not died," she asked presently, "would you have come to fetch me away?"

The lawyer coughed to hide his embarrassment and said nothing. Then Colette, joining her little hands together in an attitude of supplication, said:

"I am a naughty girl and I am worrying you. Pardon, papa."

He took her on his lap and began to undo the small basket of provisions he had purchased at the station.

"Come, Colette," he said. "I want you to eat something. You scarcely took anything at the restaurant a little while ago. You will be sick, I am afraid."

Although she was not hungry she took what he gave her, to please him. So the papamamma waited upon the child, and afterwards rocked her in his arms, humming the while an old ditty with which the nurses of Perigord are wont to sing their children to sleep. The man's voice was so sweet that the little girl fought against the sleepy feeling that was stealing over her in order to listen to it. At the end of each verse she would rouse herself and, touching her own lips with the tips of her small fingers, would lay them upon her father's mouth in token of her thanks. It was a childish tribute of gratitude that was indescribably graceful and touching.

Presently the old gentleman and lady got out at a way station and Colette and her father were left alone in the coach. Then the child at last went to sleep. Seeing which the father ceased his lullaby.

As the lawyer sat there alone in the coach holding his sleeping child in his arms, a vision of the two paths which stretched out before the little one's feet, either one of which she might choose, rose before his mind. Which

"You mustn't call me 'Monsieur.' Say 'papa.' "

"Papa."

"That's better. You are going a long way with me, dear. Are you afraid?"

She raised a pair of eyes that were still bright, in spite of the many tears they had so recently shed, and gravely shook her head.

"Why did you come with me so willingly?" the father continued. "You did not know me. If any other man had come to your mamma's house would you have gone with him without hesitation, too?"

"In Paris little girls are not fools," was the grave reply. "I knew at once that you were my father."

"How?"

"Because you were good."

"But the first words you spoke to me contained a reproach. Don't you remember saying to the strange gentleman: 'If you are my papa, why did you not come and take care of mamma?'"

"Yes, that's true. But when I looked at you more closely, I saw how much you had

suffered. So I didn't try to understand any more."

"Dear child! And did your mamma never speak to you of me?"

"Never. Only the day before she died she kept repeating your name—Louis."

"With anger?"

"She? Oh, no. She was not naughty."

"And I am not naughty either, Colette. You will see how I shall love you. In the first place I'm going to give you a new mamma."

"A new mamma?"

"And a little sister."

The child began to laugh in a curiously shy way.

"What is my sister's name?" she asked.

"Renee."

"How old is she?"

"Four years old."

"Does she know that you came after me?"

"Yes."

"And does she like it?"

"Very much."

"Ah, that's good. I shall be very nice to her."

daughter, "what's the matter with that old Ferdinand of yours? Has he left you?"

"No, mother, he is at Thiviers."

"At Thiviers? And to-day fair-day at Noutron? Why, the world is upside down."

"Ferdinand has gone to meet my husband at the station."

"Has Louis been traveling?"

"Yes—to Paris."

"To Paris! And you never said anything about it."

"Louis had to go hastily on important business. He only went day before yesterday."

"A lawsuit in Paris?"

"No."

"What, then?"

"You will know when he gets here."

"Oh, I'm in no hurry. But I don't like mysteries."

Madame Rouilhat followed her daughter into the dining-room, where she met with another surprise on surveying the table set for breakfast. It was ornamented with a profusion of flowers and there was an extra place set.

"Looks like a wedding breakfast," was the old lady's comment. "Are you expecting some one?"

"Yes, mother."

"From Paris?"

"Yes."

"Maybe I am asking too many questions. Are we incommoding you? You know you have only to say the word and we'll go."

"Oh, mamma!"

"Is your guest some great personage?"

"Not at all."

Madame Chazeau hastened to change the subject.

"Any news at Saint-Front?" she asked.

"Nothing. Where is papa? Let me go out and give him a kiss."

"Wait till he has unharnessed the horse."

"Is there no one there to take the horse?"

"Have you just found that out? My dear, where is your head?"

Anna hastened out and met her father in the hall-way. He was standing in his big boots and shaking the blue blouse that he wore over his cloth coat as if all the dust and

would she take? The one led to evil companions and worse pleasures, to want, to vice and finally to a vile death: the other led to a simple but honest life. Then there seemed to come to his ears, from out of the intense darkness that shrouded the future, a song of holy harmony calling Colette's name, and through it there shone a star, lighting the path which she was expected to take, and in that path tender hands were stretched out to protect her, to lead her to a home of love and blessedness. And the star seemed then to assume the likeness of his beloved wife, his Anna, whose heart was ever open to receive the homeless and friendless, whose holy charitableness had never yet been sounded to its depths.

At five o'clock in the morning the train reached Thiviers and Colette was awakened. Chazeau carried her out on to the platform in his arms. There he found awaiting him his man, Ferdinand, who had driven over in the buggy from Noutron.

CHAPTER III.

It was Saturday and fair-day at Noutron.

Every Saturday Monsieur and Madame Rouilhat, Madame Chazeau's father and mother, came to breakfast with their daughter.

Although Anna, in the enthusiasm of the moment, had assured her husband and mother-in-law that she would have no trouble in overcoming any objections her parents might urge against her adopting Colette, it was not without many misgivings that the devoted woman awaited their advent on that particular morning.

It was about nine o'clock when they arrived. They were surprised that the man did not as usual come out to take charge of their carriage. Madame Honorine went into the house leaving Monsieur Leander busy with the horse.

"Hullo!" said the former, embracing her

had never been reviewed by the courts, else it is impossible to tell what might have happened.

"A fine house this is," exclaimed Monsieur Leander, seating himself in a chair with his back to the fire.

Madame Honorine raised her eyes and hands to the ceiling.

"Oh, if should tell you, Leander, what I think!" she said. "There is no such thing as order here. Our daughter and her mother-in-law are ruining everything. It's all very well to be charitable and look out for the poor. But charity begins at home, I say. And then that journey!"

"What journey? Who is journeying?"

"Your son-in-law."

"Chazeau not at Noutron? Anna ought to have told me."

"Anna is a perfect dungeon of mystery. But Chazeau has gone up to Paris, and that's the truth."

"Ah, you don't say so! Perhaps some big law-suit, eh?"

"Oh, no."

"Do you know what it is."

"I guess."

"Oh, you're always guessing."

"Oh, very well, side with them."

"Well, they haven't committed any crime, I suppose. Our son-in-law is neither a sot, a spendthrift nor a libertine."

"Now you are talking at a mark, monsieur the mayor."

"I am no such thing, madame the mayoress. I am expressing myself to the best of my ability, in courteous and, I think, eloquent language."

"Indeed! You've a mighty fine opinion of yourself, haven't you?"

After this there was a long period of silence between the two, which was finally broken by the sound of a carriage in front of the door, and little Renee's voice in the hall, crying:

"Here's papa!—here's papa!"

When Monsieur Chazeau entered, the family were assembled around the breakfast table. To them he presented the little girl whom he led by the hand. The small black-robed figure bowed diffidently but with

smell of the stable and barn were still clinging to his feet and clothes. He wore a full beard, which was of a reddish color with some silver threads running through it. He had a pair of cunning, bright eyes and the complacent smile that befits a gentleman-farmer who is quite content with the lot heaven has bestowed on him. His whole bearing betokened an obstinate will accompanied by perfect physical health.

"Ah! there you are," he growled, when he caught sight of his daughter.

"Good-morning, father," said Anna.

"Good-day! Are you ruined, you two? Nice fun it is coming to see you. Where is your servant? They say that man is best served who serves himself. Perhaps so. Still, at Saint-Front I keep people to unharness the horses of those who do me the honor to visit me. If I'm going to be worse treated when I go elsewhere, I may as well turn about and go home. I earned my money. I did, and—"

"Come, papa," murmured Anna at this point. She held up her face smilingly to her father, and the old man, after holding off for

a moment, presently stooped and kissed it.

"Is breakfast ready?" he asked.

"In a few minutes. Will you take something first? A glass of Madeira?"

"No, I don't care anything for these foreign gargles. If you've got a glass of wine, I don't mind."

Madame Chazeau led him to the dining-room and gave him the wine. Then not wishing to enter into farther explanations at present she left her parents together and went into the kitchen.

Monsieur Leander Rouilhat, mayor of the commune of Saint-Front and dealer in property both real and personal, was about fifty years of age. He was a good talker, and possessed the most indomitable energy. For these reasons he had inspired the county people among whom he dwelt with a great respect for himself as a self-made man of fortune. He possessed a copy of the Code which his son-in-law had given him and he was in the habit of expounding the laws from it for his neighbors' benefit in a manner quite satisfactory to them, though fortunately his opinions

blushing. Madame Honorine did not look very pleasant, but then she was a woman, and children always have an idea that women will love and care for them, no matter how forbidding they may look. Besides, they don't often strike children and their whippings are not so hard to bear as men's are. Children know all that by instinct.

After breakfast, Renee, less from kindness than vanity, took her new sister to her mother's room to show her her pretty clothes, her dolls and her toys. Before she left the room, however, she went to her father and asked in a wheedling tone:

"Papa, what did you bring me from Paris?"

The lawyer told her he had not time to get anything for her, but the next time he went to Limoges or any of the neighboring towns he would buy her a lovely present. Renee pointed to the larger child and asked:

"Have you given her anything?"

But her mother interrupted at this point. There was an angry ring in Anna's usually sweet voice as she said:

"It is very naughty to be jealous, Renee."

Then the two children went away. After they had left the room Monsieur Rouilhat lit his pipe and Monsieur Chazeau a cigar.

"Father-in-law," said the latter, "I want you to taste some new brandy I bought the other day."

Monsieur Leander drank the brandy slowly and with an approving wag of his head. Then Madame Honorine said impatiently:

"Now for your story, Anna."

The maid entered at this moment to tell Monsieur Chazeau that several clients were waiting for him in the office. The lawyer sent word that he would be with them presently. He felt that he must stay and aid his wife to weather the storm that was about to burst upon them. Anna, therefore, told the story as briefly as possible, concluding with the words:

"Without trenching upon the rights or the fortune of our legitimate child we intend to bring up Colette and put her in the way of earning an honorable livelihood."

Madame Honorine shrugged her shoulders, dubiously.

a certain air of distinction, as became a young Parisian.

"Do not be afraid of us, Colette," exclaimed Anna. Then she and her mother-in-law hastened to the child's side and began to load her with welcoming caresses. The two country people, with little Renee between them, stood watching these proceedings in silence. Madame Chazeau, seeing that her parents awaited an explanation, gave it to them in a single sentence.

"This is my second daughter," she said, "whom I shall love dearly without ceasing to love my first one. Renee, kiss your sister."

"Her sister!" exclaimed the Rouilhats in a breath.

"She is not my sister!" cried Renee. Then the child ran out into the kitchen, slamming the door after her.

The little Parisian burst into tears. There was for a moment silence among the elders, broken only by the torturing sobs of the orphan child.

Monsieur Rouilhat paced up and down the

room once or twice. Then he stopped before Colette, saying:

"I hate to hear children cry. Give her something to eat. We'll see what is to be done, afterwards."

"I am not hungry, sir," sobbed Colette.

Monsieur Chazeau was about to say something when his wife interrupted him with a gesture.

"Louis," she said, "go to your chamber and change your clothes. Everything is laid out for you. Come back as soon as possible. We will talk the whole thing over after breakfast." Then she turned to the little one and said, "Come with me, dear."

At breakfast the children were seated alongside each other after Renee had, at her mother's command, kissed Colette. The meal was eaten in silence. The Rouilhats cast, from time to time, curious glances in the direction of the little stranger, which caused Colette to feel very awkward and ill at ease. The big man with the copper-colored beard was an object of special dread to her. Every time he looked at her she felt herself trembling and

"You are crazy to think of such a thing," she said.

Monsieur Leander laid his pipe down on his plate.

"Son-in-law," said he, "you have no right to take into your family this result of your youthful folly. You have no right, sir, understand me well, to thus impose on the good-nature and foolishness of your wife."

"Father," said Anna, calmly, "it was I who made Louis go after Colette."

"You fool, you," exclaimed her mother, losing her temper entirely. "You will die in the poor-house."

Both Chazeau and his wife bent their heads in silence before the storm. Madame Honorine then turned her attention to Madame Clorinde.

"You, madame, should have made my idiot daughter listen to reason. If you had been the mother you should be you would have said to your son: 'You have married an honest woman; your youth is over; your wild-oats have been sown; let bygones be bygones; a new life has commenced for you and you must

not foul it by bringing to your home your bastard child.' "

Then the Rouilhats made a combined assault all along the line.

"It is sheer lunacy you meditate," they cried. "You cannot keep this unknown creature here."

"You must send her back."

"What a scandal!"

"The whole town will laugh at you."

"Anna, you do not love your child. You are a coward."

"Give the wretched creature money and send her away—anywhere, away from Noutron."

"Put her in a foundling asylum."

Anna besought them not to talk so loud.

"She will hear you," urged the young mother.

"Hear us! She's got to hear us," exclaimed the exasperated pair.

"Have you no heart—no compassion?"

"It is you who have no sense," cried her father, "in daring to take into your house the child of you know not whom—some street-walker, perhaps."

After awhile the tempest subsided somewhat. The mayor of Saint-Front lit his pipe and turning to his son-in-law said in a more moderate tone:

"See here, Chazeau, you are a hard-working, honest man, I know. And you have no fault to find with us. We have kept all our promises to you. We have given you—"

"A wife whom I love and respect and venerate."

"Anna's marriage portion was—"

"Paid in full. It has never been touched."

"Just so. Now we do not expect to live forever. We shall leave behind us eight fine farms and a few francs of ready money. You have much to expect from us."

"Oh, do not let us speak of those things," interrupted Anna. "Louis works and we are quite rich enough."

"I wish," continued her father, doggedly, "to define our respective situations with relation to each other. It appears, then, according to Monsieur Chazeau's own confession, that he has nothing to complain of so far as our treatment of him is concerned. I will say frankly

that until to-day Monsieur Chazeau has ever shown himself worthy of our confidence."

"Please come to the point," urged the lawyer, seeing his father-in-law about to launch into an oration. "My clients are waiting for me."

"The point is this, son-in-law: When you were a bachelor you got into some entanglements. I myself, when I was young—"

"What's that?" exclaimed Madame Rouilhat.

"What I would say," pursued her husband, noticing the danger signal and sheering off, "is that marriage passes the sponge across the errors of youth. You have had an affair down in Paris. It is finished and you are safely married. If the other down there has a child it is not your affair. You know, sir attorney, that French law does not permit the father to be sought after in cases like that."

"Then do you think," interposed Anna, "that a father ought to let his natural children starve?"

"Starve! Haven't they arms and legs and heads like other people? Let them work.

And, besides, does a man ever know whether he is the true father, in such a case?"

At this, Chazeau started to his feet, pale with anger.

"I can tell you," he said, "here in Anna's presence, that Colette's mother was a virtuous woman."

"A student's mistress, virtuous! Oh, come, come!"

"Yes, virtuous and loyal."

"Why did you leave her then?"

"Why? Because the world—"

Here the lawyer stopped suddenly. He owed no one an explanation of his conduct, he said to himself. Besides, he ought not, in his wife's presence, to express vain regrets for the past.

"My poor Chazeau," here broke in Madame Honorine, "your *Dulcinea* has evidently amused you with fairy tales. This Colette does not look in the least like you. She has neither your hair nor your eyes, while Renee—"

"Colette is my daughter, I tell you."

Chazeau was about to add: "Anna is your daughter, and, heaven be praised, she does

not resemble you at all, either in person or disposition." But this species of argument did not seem to the lawyer to be in the best taste, so he contented himself with saying:

"Anna is the mistress here. My mother, whom you just now accused, has done her best to persuade my wife that she ought not to take the poor child. We foresaw that you would object, but we did not think you would insult us. If Anna wishes it, I will send Colette away. Think, Anna, and tell me what I must do."

"I have thought seriously and long on this subject. I will keep Colette."

At this, Chazeau left the room, followed by Madame Clorinde. When they were gone, her father, adopting the wheedling, coaxing tone, which he was wont to use with those who came to buy goods from him, opened upon the poor creature the floodgates of his formidable eloquence. He reminded her of the filial respect she owed her parents and spoke of the affection he had for Renee, the legitimate child, whom this stranger was about to rob of part of her mother's love and necessarily of

part of her fortune. To all of which Madame Chazeau replied that she would love her daughter as much in the future as in the past and that Renee would suffer in no respect from the orphan's advent; one day she would inherit the entire fortune of the family. As for Colette, her father would save for her a modest dowry out of the monies coming from his profession. At this the old gentleman lost his temper entirely.

"You are robbing our grandchild," he cried, rising and taking his hat and stick. "But you shan't rob us. We'll give our money to other heirs. Good-bye to you."

"You ought to be spanked," screamed Madame Honorine, fairly shaking her fist in her daughter's face, as she followed her husband out of the room and the house.

Monsieur and Madame Rouilhat gossiped, that day at the fair, to such good purpose that, by evening, the news was all over town.

It was the talk of the court-house, of the club, of the Cafe de la Rotunde, of the drawing-rooms and even of the neighboring farm-houses. Men spoke harshly of the conduct of

the young attorney—not of his past conduct, of the error of his youth, but of the scandalous reparation he was now endeavoring to make. The ladies of the town worked themselves up into a tremendous state of virtuous indignation and declared that they would drop Madame Chazeau's acquaintance, that they would have nothing to do with a woman who permitted her home to be polluted by the presence of a street-child, whose sin, in being born at all, was so great that it was doubtful if there were salvation for her, even in the arms of the Redeemer.

CHAPTER IV

Thirteen years have passed and Colette and Renee are now young ladies. Both are pretty, but of quite different types of beauty. Blonde and of medium height, like her mother, slender, with a pink and white complexion, with golden hair, worn in a curly bang over the temples, a charming mouth, blue eyes with long lashes and milk-white eyelids, such was Renee Chazeau in the bloom of her seventeen years. Colette Dumonteil was twenty. While her sister was lively, giddy, careless and impulsive, Colette was grave and gentle, with her tall, elegantly turned figure, her profile like that on a Greek coin, her thick, dark hair worn in smooth bandeaux, her pure white brow, her deep, black eyes and the sad, sweet smile which so often lighted her expressive face. Renee delighted in toilettes that attracted attention; Colette's gowns were invariably of simple make and somber color. They had

grown up together under the tender care of the attorney and his wife and of Madame Clorinde, who insisted that Colette should also call her "Grandmamma."

Colette had been sent as a day scholar to the establishment of the Bardet ladies. As soon as Renee was old enough, she had accompanied her sister. The younger child soon developed a jealous disposition and it was one of her chief delights to tease and hector the other in some such fashion as this:

"Me, my name is Renee Chazeau. But you are only Colette—not Chazeau. Colette is the only name you have got. My papa is your papa, but my mamma is not your mamma."

"Who told you that?" the older girl would ask in a heart-broken tone.

"Oh, some of the big girls at school. You haven't got any mamma."

"My mother is dead."

"Ah-ha. They say—"

"Well, what do they say?"

"They say your mother ran away from you; that papa picked you up in Paris and brought you home out of charity; that your mother was a bad woman."

"It is not true! It is not true!"

One evening, as they were coming out of school, some of the larger girls surrounded Colette, and began to abuse and maltreat her, jeering at her because of her birth, and insulting the memory of her mother with the coarse language they had heard at home. Renee looked on complacently while her sister defended herself as well as she could from these attacks, which were not unaccompanied by physical violence. That evening Colette got home, pale as a sheet, with her dress torn, her hair all pulled down, sobbing with anger and shame, but less sorrowful on account of the insults of the other children than because of the sneering laugh of her little sister.

As the young orphan grew up she became more and more humble and self-sacrificing. She dreaded lest she might seem to arrogate to herself something in this household where, after all, she knew she had no legal rights. When Renee would climb into her father's lap and the lawyer would cover her face with kisses, Colette would steal away, happy if she received from her father a smile or a caressing look.

When Madame Chazeau considered the subject of their wardrobe, Colette would beg for the simplest things for fear that she might awaken her little sister's jealousy. She urged that the clothes of richer material did not suit her and she felt uncomfortable in them.

The newspapers of the town printed weekly the names of the prize winners at the Bardet school. Colette's name always stood at the head of the list but poor little Renee's never appeared. The little girl began to fret and fume at this, whereupon Colette took measures to prevent her own name appearing in the list.

But these instances of delicate feeling were all thrown away upon Renee, who continued to plague and humiliate her sister whenever she could find an opportunity. In the evenings she would so conduct herself by word and gesture, seen and heard by Colette alone, that the latter was glad to seek refuge in the kitchen with the servants.

"Where are you going?" her father would sometimes ask.

"I'm going to help Margaret with the chest-nuts."

"Oh," Anna would say, "Margaret, Ferdinand and Marietta can attend to the chestnuts. They don't need you."

"Stay with us, Colette," Madame Clorinde would urge.

"What do you want to prevent her going to the kitchen for?" Renee would sneeringly ask. "Mademoiselle prefers the kitchen-folk to us, evidently."

It was now the end of the spring season of 1877. During the thirteen years which had passed since the advent of the orphan child into the Chazeau household, the little town of Noutron, which after all is not so bad a little town, had forgotten the harsh and unkind things it had said and thought at the time. Society had reinstated the attorney's wife in its good graces. The members of the bar of Noutron, who thirteen years before had animadverted so strongly against the scandal Chazeau was bringing into their midst, and had in consequence given him the cold shoulder, were now only too proud to clasp the hand of the man who had become their leader.

Chazeau had in 1870 been a captain of mi-

litia and had fought bravely at the battle of Coulmiers, where fifty-two of his men had lost their lives. He, himself, had been wounded in the left leg by the bursting of a shell and ever since had limped perceptibly. For his conduct during the war he had been awarded the ribbon of the Legion of Honor, which he now wore with the dignity and modesty which distinguished his life in other respects.

Colette was the joy and pride of the Chazeau family. The Rouilhats themselves had softened toward her. Madame Honorine was never tired of recalling the time when she, stricken by a grave contagious disease, which had nearly been the death of her, had been nursed back to hope and life by the hitherto despised Parisian.

"She is a plucky young woman," Monsieur Leander had declared with conviction on this occasion.

So, by patience and courage, the orphan had succeeded in persuading the world in which she lived that she might be forgiven for her shameful origin. When the two girls were seen together in public they were spoken

of as "the Chazeau girls," which was a great comfort to Colette and caused the future to look less gloomy to her. But Renee was eaten up by jealousy, that miserable instinct which dominates weak souls, sometimes driving them even to the commission of crime. Deep in her soul she entertained the conviction that her parents loved Colette more than they loved her and she never ceased to think of the time when she might be able to drive this stranger from her home. She loved to make suggestions like the following, which she knew were as gall and wormwood to poor Colette's soul.

"You know, my dear Colette," she would sigh, "that we are not very well off. Our lands don't bring in much rent, now that the phylloxera have got into the vineyards. Papa works hard, but it is difficult to collect fees just now, I know."

Whereupon Colette would murmur with a sinking heart:

"I think I will try and earn my own living. I can get a teacher's position. I don't want to be a burden."

"Well, that is not a bad idea. Remember your dignity is at stake."

"Don't you think you are a little hard on me, Renee?"

Anna and Madame Clorinde did their best to protect the orphan from Renee's brutal and fantastic hostility. They declared there was no reason why Colette should be a school-teacher or go into any other employment. She would marry some day and then all would be well. If they ever undertook to cite Colette as an example of good behavior, which it would be well for Renee to imitate, the latter would stamp her foot in anger and cry:

"Oh, Colette this and Colette that. I hear nothing but Colette. It's disgusting!"

Once when there was to be a grand ball at the house of the receiver of finances and Madame Chazeau spoke of taking both the girls, Renee declared:

"If Colette goes, I shall not, that's flat."

"Why not?"

"Because I should be ashamed."

"Of your sister?"

"Yes."

"You wicked, wicked girl! Aren't you ashamed of yourself. If your father knew—"

"He would send me away. Very well, send me away. Am I your daughter or not? Tell me that. And she, is she your daughter?"

"I love you both."

"You have no right to love her."

Her mother, a woman as devoted to well-doing as she was impotent to put down wrongdoing, suffered in silence. As for Chazeau, he was too much immersed in his law business to be able to learn anything of the storm that was brewing around his hearth-stone.

Sometimes Renee would take fits of being conscience-smitten and would express great contrition for her evil conduct. She would humbly beg pardon of her mother, her grandmother and her abused sister. She would be very kind and amiable to the latter until some new whim aroused the bitterness of her hatred. Colette, for her part, set herself resolutely to the task of conquering the affection of the capricious child.

By and by the marriage of Mademoiselle Chazeau with a young lawyer of Noutron, Monsieur Gabriel Lagrange, began to be bruited among the gossips of the city. At the

ball of the receiver of finances young Lagrange had been very devoted. On their return from the ball, the two girls—for Colette had gone after all—who occupied the same chamber, had talked over their impressions. Renee had danced a good deal with a certain handsome young man by whom she had been greatly charmed.

“What a heavenly waltzer the count is,” she sighed. “He is so graceful and elegant, too, don’t you think? But you hardly danced at all. Why didn’t you?”

“I preferred to talk to Monsieur Lagrange.”

“The lawyer? Not much fun in him, is there?”

“He admires you extravagantly.”

“Poor fellow!”

All night long, Renee dreamed of her partner in the waltz, young Count Paul de Bressieres, who was a country neighbor of her grandfather, Monsieur Rouilhat. From the windows of his house at Saint-Front, the Bressieres chateau was plainly visible. It was a fine old manor-house, which she delighted to people with heroic men and women out of her own

imagination. The young lady was fond of romances and devoured many a novel in secret. She liked to read about lovely chatelaines, all robed in white, waiting upon their lords and masters; of their grand hunts in which might be heard the galloping of horses, the baying of hounds, and the winding of horns, as the cavaliers and their ladies swept by; and of their baronial halls in which they stood receiving the homage of prostrate throngs of serfs. And now she loved to think of these fancy-pictures of life as actually taking place in the lordly mansion of the Bressieres; a mansion upon which, by the way, her old grandfather, Rouilhat, had long had his calculating and covetous eye. She compared the luxurious existence of the nobleman with the poor, commonplace life of Gabriel Lagrange, and then her spirits began to droop as she reflected upon the immense social distance between the Bressieres family and her own. Never, she feared, would she arrive at the height of her desires and hear herself called countess. Still she could not help remembering how devoted the young count had been at the ball. There

had been almost a passionate pressure of his arm as he held her in the waltz, which had thrilled all through her body. She wished that he might become poor. She was rich and her fortune might be used to regild his escutcheon. That sort of thing happened every day in France. Perhaps it might happen to her.

Every Saturday, Count Paul rode into Noutron mounted on a beautiful black horse. He came to visit his cousins, the Mareuils, who lived next door to the Chazeaus. Renee knew that he reached the house about nine o'clock and on Saturday mornings she watched eagerly from behind the curtains of the dining-room for the appearance of the familiar figure. She would maneuver to be left alone on these mornings so that nothing might distract her attention and cause her, perchance, to miss seeing the count. If she failed to see him she would be cross for the whole day. Sometimes she thought, with a feeling of joy, that the count, ordinarily so distant in his manner, was becoming more familiar with her father when the two met on the street. He would

inquire after the health of the ladies of the lawyer's family and beg the latter to present his compliments to them. The count was of different politics from the lawyer, being a legitimist while Chazeau was a republican. But opposing political views did not prevent his being very friendly with the lawyer as with others of the leading citizens.

Presently the count's aunt, Madame Mar-eiul, came to call on the Chazeau ladies. She was soon after followed by the count himself. Renee had expected that he would visit their house in course of time but had been considerably disappointed that he had put off calling for so long. When he finally came, she managed so as to have Colette away from the house. After he had gone she could not conceal her satisfaction and pride.

"What a noble gentleman," she exclaimed, enthusiastically.

"Didn't you think his talk was rather frivolous?" asked her mother.

"Oh, no."

"Monsieur Lagrange, I think—"

"You aren't going to compare that young

lawyer, Lagrange, with a gentleman of birth like Count de Bressieres?"

"Monsieur Lagrange is a worthy young man who has intelligence."

"But he is so commonplace."

"Renee, you do not imagine that Monsieur de Bressieres is coming here with any serious motives, do you?"

"Mamma, I do not permit myself to imagine anything."

"He only called out of politeness."

"Indeed!"

"Renee, you are blushing. My child, you must not get foolish notions into your head."

Later, Colette took Madame Chazeau aside.

"May I," she began, in an anxious tone, "speak to you about a thing which is no business of mine but which concerns your happiness very closely?"

"Yes, Colette. Speak."

"I have been watching Renee very closely lately and I can't help seeing that she is getting ideas into her head which were better not there."

"You refer to Monsieur de Bressieres, do you not?"

"Yes, madame. Ever since the ball I have been worried about my sister. If she could only bring herself to think of Monsieur Gabriel Lagrange. He is just the husband for her. I know he could and would make her happy. But the count—"

"Will make her unhappy?"

"I fear so."

"But he has not offered himself as a suitor."

"Oh, I'm so glad."

Then Colette began to speak rapidly, as if she were desirous of getting something off her mind.

"You will pardon me, I know," she said, "if what I say to you sounds a little impertinent. It comes from my heart. You have done so much for me that I want to try and do something for you."

"Dear girl! What do you know of Monsieur de Bressieres?"

"Monsieur Rouilhat knows him and his family well."

"Yes. The de Bressieres are our neighbors at Saint-Front. I never saw Monsieur Paul out in the country. His father and mother

were rather haughty, I remember, but the marchioness was a very charitable woman."

"Monsieur Rouilhat says—"

"Oh, father dislikes the nobility, I know. What does he say?"

"He says that the Bressieres are ruining themselves and that Monsieur Paul has altogether too luxurious tastes. He is looking out for the chateau—"

"The dear old revolutionist. He has his eye on all the chateaux. But you are right. We must be careful. Your sister is getting more and more interested every day."

"Hush! Here she is. I'm going to put in a word for Monsieur Lagrange. Renee, see here."

"What do you wish?"

"Come out doors with me, I want to talk to you."

"You and mamma are hatching some plot between you," said Renee, looking suspiciously at them.

"We are plotting for your happiness, dear," said the mother, indulgently.

Renee followed her sister out of the room.



"I MEAN THAT YOU ARE A MONSTER OF JEALOUSY, AND THAT I HATE YOU."

The two girls went into the garden. After a few moments of conversation the younger girl turned upon Colette and looking at her with a spiteful gleam in her cold, blue eyes said:

“I understand your game perfectly. It is quite unnecessary for you to wear your mask any longer.”

“Renee! What do you mean?”

“I mean that you are a monster of jealousy and that I hate you.”

CHAPTER V

In Perigord, and especially in the neighborhood of Noutron, the land is becoming more and more divided into small peasant holdings. The old feudal dwellings are falling into decay and gradually disappearing under the influence of storm and wind and partly also under blow of pick and shovel. No one dare buy them, for the expense of maintaining them is too great for any but the most princely purses. So the stones that formerly were part of the walls of some old feudal castle you may now see, cleaned and scoured, in those of a dozen little red-roofed cottages. Where the great parks were are now copses of carefully trimmed trees and the green meadow grass waves over what were once ornamental ponds. The building material crumbles away or is used for other purposes. The iron-work of some old crypt-grating does duty on ten barn doors. The frame-work of a tower furnishes the wood

for twenty roofs, and one big chimney contains all the bricks used in an entire farm-house.

Old Leander Rouilhat is the principal despoiler of the old chateaux of the neighborhood. He creeps upon them, first with a mortgage, then a foreclosure, and finally a sale.

At the sound of his penetrating voice the old turrets seem to shake to their foundations and on the land of one big estate arise fences enough to enclose a thousand small ones. In this way he has appropriated the castle and demesne of the Rochefoucaulds, of La Renaudie, the famous conspirator of Amboise, and many others. The only one that remains standing in the whole country-side is the chateau of the de Bressieres and even this has lost one of its towers. Its big black shadow against the western sky still remains to exasperate Monsieur Rouilhat. Every morning as the old gentleman surveys it from his dining-room window he snarls: "Ah, there you are still, eh? Never mind; I'll have you down one of these days."

The big house is surrounded by wide meadows, woods, ponds and an amphitheater of

hills on which the vine grows verdant every spring and golden every fall.

The marquis and marchioness have but one child, Count Paul, who has just arrived at his twenty-third year. The young man has been educated at the Jesuit college at Sarlat and after a year's military service in the seventh regiment of dragoons has come back to Perigord to live. From time to time he goes up to Paris, especially during the races, and always comes back with the desire strong within him to have his parents take up their residence in Paris—a desire which the old people resolutely refuse to satisfy.

“When you get married,” the marquis says, “you may go to Paris to live if you like. But your mother and I are quite contented where we are. We don't care to move, thank you.”

The Marquis Raymond de Bressieres is a tall, thin, pleasant-faced gentleman, with a gray beard which he keeps carefully trimmed. He is dignified looking and bears himself with the aristocratic air that bespeaks the *vieille roche*. He looks as if his proper place were up in one of the picture frames beside his ancestors.

He is one of those placidly proud old royalists who prefer to look at life from a distance rather than live it at first hand; who got along with the Empire and are getting along with the Republic; and who, without doing anything to precipitate it, are calmly looking forward to the time when the world shall come under their dominion again.

The marquis made no visits, but spent the most of his time walking, driving, reading and dreaming. His wife, Marchioness Aline, erect and stately, still beautiful despite the silver threads that were increasing in her fair hair, was a perfect type of the patrician French woman. She occupied herself with the household government and with charitable works. And so the two lived their simple country life, reverently and piously, as became two old aristocrats who had nothing to do but to await the coming of the night.

After his return to the chateau, Count Paul, who loved pleasure and had lived a pretty gay life at Paris when his regiment had been stationed at Versailles, projected some entertainments to which he invited the neigh-

boring gentry and their ladies. But he was not long in wearying of dinners with rural squires where he always saw the same faces and heard the same talk. Then he got up some wolf-hunts and boar-hunts. He might be seen almost any day on some portion of the estate with his gun in his hands and a pointer or two at his heels. Occasionally he diverted himself with some mild flirtation with a farmer's daughter. But this was tame sport to the count and generally resulted in his getting disgusted with the country and all that pertained thereto, and going up to Paris for a little dissipation that was more to his taste.

Paul de Bressieres was a large, handsome young man with a complexion of marble paleness, an aquiline nose, fair, curly hair, dark, fierce eyes, that took a caressing expression when he talked to women, and a laughing mouth shaded by a silky, brown mustache. He was the heir of a great fortune and was looking forward to some great marriage worthy of his birth and fortune, when Renee Chazeau crossed his path. At once he had fallen desperately in love with her, subjugated by the

first sincere passion of his life. He was quite aware of the tremendous obstacles that lay in his path should he endeavor to realize his dreams. But his brave, undisciplined nature determined to overcome them, cost what it might.

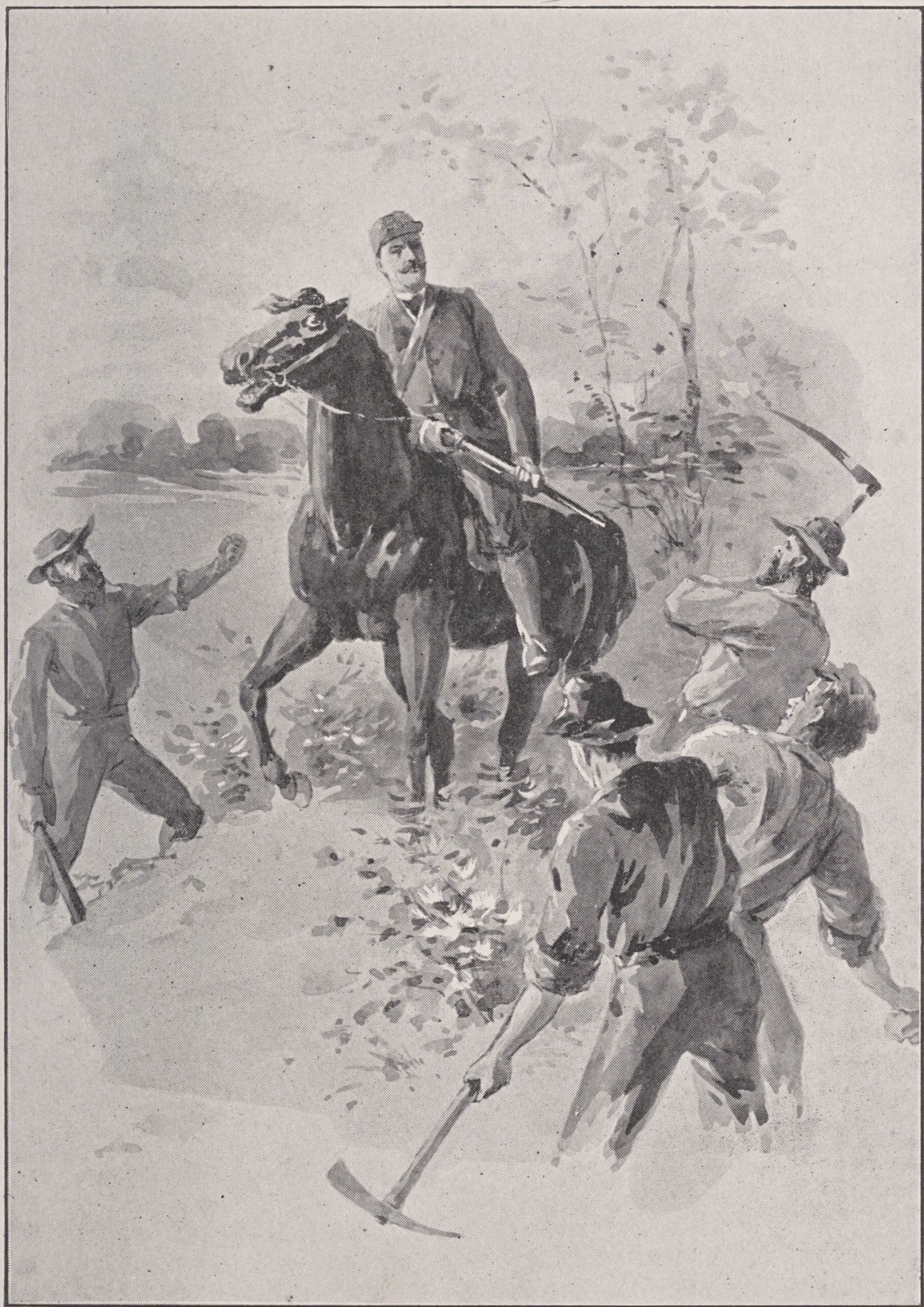
He was much beloved in the village because of his generosity; and he was not a little hated also on account of his way of riding rough-shod over those who got in his way. The country people told an anecdote of him which well illustrated his contempt for danger and for the lives of others. It had occurred three years previously, at the end of the month of September, just before vintage time. For several days he had ridden with his pack of hounds, despite the protests of the farmers, straight through their vineyards, where but few of the vines had been spared by the phylloxera. One morning, the farmers got together, armed with mattocks and scythes, and determined to stop him. The count, as he rode up, saw them some distance away. He drew his horse in a few feet from them, and, unslinging his carbine from his shoulder, took aim, saying:

"Disperse, you loafers, or I'll lay out two of you."

The threat was sufficient to dampen the courage of the peasants, who forthwith decamped in all directions. That same day Paul might have been seen in the village, shaking hands with the men, giving money to the children, and kissing the pretty girls. No one seemed to take it amiss of the cordial, generous-hearted young fellow that he had been a few hours before ready to slaughter them like wild beasts. He promised, however, not to hunt any more until after the harvest and kept his word.

Monsieur Leander Rouilhat, less needy and so less servile than his neighbors, was greatly enraged when he heard of this performance of the young count.

"You are a lot of cowards," he had exclaimed to the farmers. "Was there no revolution of '89, then? Is there no Code? Are not the laws made as much for those who suffer as for those who enjoy? Let him cross my fields once, and by thunder, we'll see what will happen."



"DISPERSE, YOU LOAFERS, OR I'LL LAY OUT TWO OF YOU."

One morning Count Paul drove to Thiviers to meet one of his old regimental friends, Baron Leonce de Verdac, who was coming on a visit to the chateau. On their way home, the young men reviewed their garrison memories together and Bressieres tormented his friend with questions, with the persistency that might be expected from a provincial, who yet has been initiated into the life of Paris, when he meets a new arrival from the city, one who yesterday rode in the Bois and dined on the Boulevard, who brings the latest gossip of the drawing-rooms and clubs.

The family received the visitor cordially. He was assigned the room which adjoined Paul's—a handsome apartment whose high windows overlooked a beautiful country. It was very much to the baron's taste and he straightway began to feel at home.

"Dear Leonce," said Paul, "I'll do my best to make you have a good time."

"Oh, I shall enjoy myself."

"Truly?"

"Why of course. Don't you?"

"Sometimes."

"Are you in love?" asked Verdac, abruptly.

"Almost," was the somewhat awkward response.

"Married woman?"

"No."

"Do you mean marriage?"

"Certainly."

"Am I asking too many questions?"

"No. But nothing is decided. My parents know nothing, as yet."

"Well, you know me. I'm silent as the grave. You can trust me if you want to talk."

"Thanks. Later on I'll tell you."

Then, by way of changing the conversation, he exclaimed:

"Oh, Leonce, you don't know what hunting you missed by not being here last winter. Come, I must show you my dogs. Have a cigar?"

Linking arms, the two young fellows went out to the offices of the chateau.

Baron de Verdac was a colossus, larger even than Monsieur Rouilhat and better built, with the shoulders of a prize-fighter. His black hair was almost kinky, there was a deep scar

across his swarthy face, and he had long, curling, brown mustaches. He said he was born in the West Indies and was a descendant of some former negro king. He got his title of baron from his father, who had been a general under the first empire. He was now dressed all in blue and wore a traveling hat. His clothes were new, which was accounted for by the following facts.

"What have you been doing since our garrison days?" Paul had asked him one day the summer before when he had met Leonce on the boulevard in Paris.

"Oh, having a good time," the other had answered jauntily.

The young count had been satisfied with this answer, the more so because Verdac did not offer to borrow money from him as he had usually done in the old garrison days. Then the baron had explained that he was employed in the service of a curb-stone broker. But this was not the fact. The truth was that Verdac was at that time living gratis at the table of a gambling hell, the proprietors of which felt kindly disposed toward the needy gentleman.

They had use sometimes for the giant and athlete, who was also known to be hand in glove with some influential newspaper men. He was hail-fellow well met with the habitues of the place and his name and title sounded well to new pigeons who were to be plucked. But one day the police closed the place and after that the poor gentleman had a hard time, wandering about Paris like a lost soul on the hither side of Styx. He obtained a precarious existence by acting as second in duels; and he was even thought to have a more dubious means of livelihood. He was beginning to be in a very bad way indeed when it occurred to him to write to his friend de Bressieres for aid. Thanks to the five hundred francs which Paul sent him, he had been enabled to indulge in a new outfit of clothes, and now here he was down at the chateau, a little thin indeed, but determined to fatten up again as soon as possible.

The mulatto was a good talker and before long all the inhabitants of the chateau, masters and servants alike, were charmed by his cleverness. Before three weeks had passed,

the fastidious old marquis had been completely captured by the big fellow and even the marchioness cited him as a pattern to her son. Leonce was shrewd enough to see that religion was one of his cues while at the chateau. So he got up early every morning and ostentatiously escorted the mistress to church, leaving Paul asleep in bed until the hour of breakfast. The men-servants were won over by the numerous cigars given them by the new arrival—cigars to which, it is needless to say, the baron helped himself out of Paul's boxes. Never before had Ambrose, the coachman, and Clarot, the groom, smoked so much.

The old comrades in arms took a ride together nearly every day. As they rode up the village street, many glances of admiration were cast at the soldierly figure of the mulatto. The rosy-cheeked farmers' daughters glanced at each other mischievously, saying as the baron passed:

"A fine sprig of a fellow, eh, my dear?"

"He must be the son of some big grenadier."

"Oh, no, he is of noble blood."

"If every Frenchman was built like that," growled an old veteran of the first Napoleon's wars, "the Prussians would not have had so easy a time with us."

Verdac always took pains to respond to the salutations of the country people and soon became very popular among them. Some of the peasants who were Bonapartists—a class who never can be made to believe in the death of the Prince Imperial—began to whisper it about that the baron was the prince in disguise.

Under the baron's influence Paul began to think less and less of Renee Chazeau.

The two men visited at the houses of the neighboring gentry, the stranger everywhere winning golden encomiums. Garden parties, dinners, and balls followed each other in rapid succession at the chateau.

"You have forgotten that nonsense you had in your head when I came, haven't you, Paul?" Leonce asked his friend one day.

"Pretty much," was the frank reply.

"What was the poor girl's name?"

"Oh, you don't care to know."

"Yes. Perhaps I'll marry her myself. Ah!

you don't like that. I see you're not so thoroughly cured after all."

Several times the young men came to Noutron, where they dined with the Mareuils. After dinner Paul would lounge up the street, cigar in hand, ostentatiously paying no attention to the neighboring house. But one evening on their return to the chateau he seemed more than usually excited. When they were alone together upstairs he said to the baron:

"Leonce, did you happen to notice to-day a lovely, little, blonde head at the window of the house next to my aunt's?"

"The lovely, little, blonde head of Mademoiselle Renee Chazeau? Yes, to be sure."

"Ah, then, you know my secret?"

"Bah! Everybody knows that you are in love with one of the pretty daughters of the leader of the Noutron bar. When did she hook you?"

But seeing that his friend did not like this expression, Leonce hastened to add:

"She is very pretty, that little Chazeau girl."

"The beauty of youth, yes."

"Sapristi! How she did ogle you as we passed by. Paul, you are a great hypocrite. You never turned a hair, or an eye-winker when that pretty white hand drew back the window curtain and those big black eyes—"

"No—they are blue."

—"sparkled and softened at sight of you. And yet you are over head and heels in love with her, that's plain."

"Yes, I am."

"Shall you marry her?"

"I don't know."

"Bosh! What, a country lawyer's daughter? If you want her, run away with her and set up a little establishment at Brantome, say—under the rose of course—but, as for marriage—"

"You don't know what you are talking about," interrupted Bressieres, roughly. "Mademoiselle Chazeau is not that kind of a person."

"Has she religious scruples?"

"No, she has self-respect."

"Oh, ho, my poor Paul, I'm afraid you are past cure, indeed."

Then Bressieres poured his whole heart out to his friend. He told him how he had done everything in his power to conquer his love but was now forced to confess that he had been conquered by it. He would marry Renee Chazeau at all hazards, but he knew how hostile would be his parents to what they regarded as a mesalliance. Would not Leonce aid him to get the consent of his father and mother?

The baron shook his head.

"In love, eh?" he muttered musingly. "Was that the reason you slipped away the other day from your father and me when we were all together in Noutron?"

"Yes."

"Did you call on the young lady?"

No, I went to my aunt Mareuil's."

"I don't understand."

"From her parlor windows I could watch Renee walking in the garden."

"Ho-ho! Why, you are as silly as a school-boy."

"Yes, I know. I suppose I am what is called love-sick. I stole out into my aunt's

garden and concealed myself behind a yew tree. On the other side of the garden-wall she was walking up and down. And she looked so pale, she, who is generally so bright and happy-looking! Once I thought I heard her murmur my name. Oh, if it were possible that I could drive the look of care from that young face! You know, once after the ball at the receiver of finances where I met her, I called upon her with my cousins. Then people began to gossip about us and I hesitated to go there again. But now—"

"You will press your suit?"

"With all my might."

"What will your father and mother say? A pretty pickle you are getting yourself into."

"I am afraid so and I want your aid."

"To soften the blow, eh?"

"Yes, my dear Leonce."

Monsieur de Verdac became very grave.

"I am only a stranger here," he said impressively, "and very grateful for the hospitality that you and yours have shown to me. I would almost do anything to return to you a little of the kindness that has been heaped

upon me here. And now that you have spoken so frankly to me I feel that I should be lacking in my duty both as friend and guest if I hesitated to say to you what I am going to say."

"Speak."

"This marriage cannot take place."

"It shall."

"Do not be foolish."

"I love Renee, I tell you."

"You scarcely know her."

"I worship her."

"Do not excite yourself, my dear Paul. Think of your father, that personification of honor, and your mother, whom you revere. Think of your ancestors. What a lowering of your family pride!"

"I tell you she is worthy of me. I will marry her."

"Very well, then. I must say, good-bye."

"You will go away."

"At once. Your people shall not accuse me of have encouraged you in your madness, by winking at it."

Verdac was a clever actor and he felt that

by taking this course he was not only strengthening his moral hold on his young friend but also adding to his credit with the marquis and marchioness. He had measured and weighed all the chances beforehand, for he had long known that it was only a question of time for this confession to be made to him. He had figured out of the complications that were about to ensue some very good opportunities for feathering his own nest. On the one hand, there was money to be got from Paul, if he should help him to overcome the objections of his parents. On the other hand, if Paul got tired of the fight, he, Leonce, might have the chance to make an advantageous marriage himself. And if Paul ran away with the girl, the baron saw no end to his pickings in the capacity of Pandarus to the young lovers. The mulatto earnestly hoped that an elopement would be the final outcome of the affair.

At Paul's earnest solicitation, Verdac consented to postpone his departure, but upon condition that his friend should make no attempt to enlighten his parents as to the state of his feelings until he, the baron, had first

spied out the land. On that very evening while Paul was out in the park thinking of his love and sighing at the moon, the baron had a long talk with the marquis and marchioness about their son.

"Rumors come to us from Noutron," said the lady, "that Paul is secretly paying attention to one of the Chazeau girls. We are not disposed to place much credence in the gossip. The Chazeau family is a very respectable one, we understand. But of course an alliance with the *bourgeoisie* is entirely out of the question for our son."

"You might add, my dear," quoth the marquis, with some asperity, "that Paul disregards the duty he owes us. He has given grounds for the reports that are being spread about him. At the ball some time ago where he met Mademoiselle Chazeau he would dance with no one but her. The other afternoon he spent two hours hidden in his aunt's garden at Noutron, like a lunatic, staring at the young lady, who was in her own garden on the other side of the fence. His aunt and cousins were very much put out about it. Paul's nonsense must be put a stop to at once."

Then the marchioness appealed to Verdac for advice. The latter frankly confessed the confidence that had been given to him by their love-sick son and dwelt at length upon his own highly proper conduct and the good advice he had given his friend on that occasion. He said he would make it the business of his life to watch over Paul, his brother in arms, and see that he entered into no rash engagement on account of this foolish love-affair. The two elders thanked their guest with tears in their eyes.

“Marquis,” said the baron, “I think you had better leave this matter to me. The fact that Paul has said nothing to either of you, convinces me that he is really not so much in love after all. I shall be able to make him hear reason, I am sure. If you spoke to him he is such an impetuous fellow that I fear in his present state of mind he might do something rash. But, as his intimate friend, I can get at him in a way that will not arouse his suspicions or hostility. I was going away, but if there is a chance to be useful to you, my dear friends, why, of course—”

"Oh, don't leave us," cried the marchioness, earnestly. "I don't know what we should do without you. I am sure Providence has sent you to our assistance."

Later in the evening the baron was sitting in his room smiling fondly at a bottle of brandy which he held in his hand preparatory to pouring out a drink.

"Pretty well played," he chuckled—he was already a trifle maudlin—"Here the old people already are begging me to stay. I don't care now whether that fool Paul gets married or not. I'll feather my nest either way. Meanwhile I'm well lodged and fed here and the farmers' daughters are buxom. Leonce, my boy, here's your health."

Then he drank himself drunk and went to bed.

CHAPTER VI

While Baron de Verdac was thus enacting the role of mentor at the Chateau de Bressieres, poor Renee was daily becoming more and more hopeless of ever wearing the coronet of a countess. She imagined that Colette was the obstacle that stood in the way of her happiness and so charged against that unhappy creature the misery of her restless days and sleepless nights.

Some women never know rest in pursuing their desire for revenge when it has once taken possession of them. Renee was one of these. No matter how humbly Colette comported herself, she never could succeed in softening the blind fury of her sister toward her. Mademoiselle Chazeau—for Renee insisted on arrogating this title to herself—invented a thousand torments which she secretly employed to drive poor Colette from the house. Sometimes one thing, sometimes another;

here a gibe, there some remark about the cost of living, or a sarcasm about Colette's appearance or dress. She invariably grew angry when the dressmaker sent in a bill for "goods furnished the Misses Chazeau." She made the merchants open separate accounts, one with "Mademoiselle Renee Chazeau" and another with "Mademoiselle Colette Dumontheil." She took great delight in humiliating her sister in the presence of strangers. If any one asked her about Colette's health she would answer stiffly, "Mademoiselle Dumontheil is well." She would never be seen on the street with Colette, preferring to take Mariette when she went out to walk.

Finally, feeling herself unable to bear her sister's heartless conduct any longer, Mademoiselle Dumontheil told her father that she was going away. Not being willing to subject her tormentor to the paternal wrath, which would surely have fallen upon Renee, had Monsieur Chazeau been aware of the real state of the case, she told him that she intended to become a teacher. But her father would listen to nothing of the sort.

"My dear," he said, "I have worked for you all these years and you have now a very comfortable marriage portion. You shall stay under my roof until you choose a husband."

And nothing could shake this resolution.

It was about seven o'clock in the morning. A beam of sunlight shone through the curtains of blue and white silk that covered the window of the chamber in which the two girls slept. By its dim light Colette was combing her long black hair before the glass of their dressing table. When this task was finished and the thick braids were securely bound about the small head, she moved softly about the room finishing her toilette. She kept very still for fear of waking her sister who was fast asleep in bed. Her face was wan and pale; there were dark rings under her eyes; her lips, usually so fresh and crimson, were white and parched; and there were deep lines in her forehead. These signs indicated the torture of soul through which the young woman was passing at the hands of her only sister. Presently the latter called from the bed in a sleepy tone:

"Colette!"

"Yes, Renee."

"Aren't you finished dressing yet?"

"I'm just going downstairs."

"Don't go. I want to speak to you. Shut the door and come here."

Colette did as she was ordered. Renee looked up at her from her pillow through a tangle of yellow curls. A mocking smile came into her eyes as she saw the traces of suffering on her sister's face.

"Don't tremble so," she laughed. "I'm not going to beat you."

Then pointing to a chair, on which were huddled pell-mell her own dress, corsets, chemise, skirts and stockings, she said:

"Throw those things on the floor and sit down."

But the orderly Colette brought another chair and seated herself in front of her sister.

"It is rather dark," she suggested, timidly, "shall I draw the curtains?"

"If you choose. You big fool, you act as if I was going to kill you. Oh, the sun hurts my eyes!"



"Shall I close the curtains again?"

"Yes. No. Come here and listen to me."

As respectful in her manner as the most docile of servants, Mademoiselle Dumontheil seated herself and prepared to listen to Mademoiselle Chazeau.

"Colette," said the other, "you are not a bad sort of girl. I am sure you would be sorry to know that I was unhappy."

"I should be very sorry."

"Well, then, you must know that I am wretched. I hate my life. You alone can lead me back to hope."

"What must I do?"

"I trust I shall not hurt your feelings when I tell you."

"I am strong. Go on."

"For a long time I have wanted to speak to you about this matter. I am in love. I love Monsieur de Bressieres. It is my secret passion that has made me so captious and unjust to you of late. You will forgive me?"

"Certainly. I could not bear malice against you, dear."

"Sister—"



"Oh, Renee, you don't know how sweet it is to me to hear you say 'sister.' "

Mademoiselle Chazeau smiled indulgently at the enthusiasm of the other.

"Do you think Count Paul has ceased his attentions to me because he does not wish to marry the daughter of a *bourgeois*?"

"Probably that is the reason."

"Maybe the insolence of Grandpa Rouilhat has had something to do with it?"

"I don't think you should accuse him of insolence. He is good, and brave, and wise."

"You flatter him."

"I respect him."

"That country bumpkin!"

"He is kind and faithful to those he loves."

"Why don't you get him to adopt you? He is very rich."

"I am not here for the purpose of robbing you of your rights."

"Well, anyway, Count Paul has gone away, though I know he loves me. I know the reason why, too. It is not because of our plebeian estate, or of grandpa's bad manners. It is because of you."

"What have I done?"

"Nothing. It is because you exist."

Then Renee sat bolt upright in bed and began to labor with her sister. She did not want Colette to go away for good, she said, but would she not take herself off for just a few months? She teased her sister in a cunning, caressing way of which she well knew the power, while every word she spoke pierced the orphan's breast like a spear.

"You see, sister, your position in the household is such an anomalous one. And the nobility have so many scruples."

"Do you really think it is this that bars your way to happiness?"

"Well, you can see for yourself."

"When must I go away?" said Colette, rising.

"As soon as possible."

"I will see the superintendent of schools myself and get a place as teacher at once."

"But that will take time. There is not always a vacancy."

"I dare not speak to—to your father—about it again. He will not listen to me."

And I have no money. It would be terrible—to find myself—all alone—in the streets of Paris—without any money. If I should be unable to get any work what would become of me?”

Mademoiselle Dumontheil let these words drop slowly as if speaking to herself. Her poor lips trembled slightly as if she were struggling with a strong desire to give way to tears. Renee stretched herself out luxuriously under the soft bed-coverings, and proceeded affably.

“I shall never forget the sacrifice you are making for my sake, dear. When I am Countess de Bressieres you shall come to see me at the chateau and at Paris, for I think the count will make up his mind to live in Paris. I will charge myself with the task of explaining your abrupt departure to my parents. You may write me from time to time. I will tell my father—let me see, what shall I tell my father?”

“You may tell our father—for he is mine as well as yours—that I have gone to Paris to work, and to live an honest life. Under-

stand—an honest life. In a week I shall have left Noutron.”

“Do you promise? Will you swear?”

“I swear by the Virgin.”

Colette went out of the room rather hastily. For a long time she stood in the hallway leaning against the wall, and weeping bitterly. Then she went into the garden and bathed her eyes with water from the fountain.

CHAPTER VII

One morning, Paul, after a stormy interview with his parents on the subject of his matrimonial intentions, departed in a rage and rode into Noutron. Leonce, more than ever in love with the role he was playing, busied himself in consoling the marquis and marchioness, swearing to them that he would surely prevent the marriage. In the afternoon he awaited the return of the young man, determined to take him seriously to task for his lack of filial respect, and to remind him, in forcible terms, of his duty to his family.

Monsieur and Madame de Bressieres placed all their hope in Leonce. The latter, full of his schemes for mending his own fortunes, had conceived a lively appreciation for the life he was leading at the chateau, where he was the soul of everything. He rode and fenced daily with Paul. Being a master of the foil himself, he gave lessons to the young

count, at which the marquis assisted, applauding the teacher and encouraging the pupil.

Little by little the visitor had taken the place in the household formerly occupied by the count, who was now so deeply in love that he was good for nothing else. It was Verdac who rang for the servants and ordered them to harness or saddle the horses. It was to Verdac the cook came for advice about her *menu* each morning before submitting it to her mistress. It was Verdac who fixed the hours that the coachman, Ambrose, and the groom, Clarot, were to have to themselves. It was Verdac to whom the merchants, who sold wine, beer, and cigars to the chateau, came for their orders. It was Verdac who wrote to Count Paul's tailor—referring to him as his cousin—inclosing his own measure, so that one bill might be made for the clothes of both. It was Verdac who spent part of his time nosing about the cellar and persuading the cellarman to lay aside some of the best wines and brandies for his own use. It was to Verdac the tenants came with their incessant pleas. Verdac did so well for them that

he was always a welcome guest at their houses, where he worked sad havoc among their pretty daughters. It was to the pious Verdac the priest and neighboring sisters of charity came with their subscription-lists. The marchioness, thanks to the efforts of the baron, quadrupled the amount of her alms. It was Verdac who gave to the beggars the old clothes, hats, and shoes, that were cast out of the wardrobes of the three gentlemen. Every one loved Verdac and called down blessings on his name.

The mulatto appreciated the indomitable nature of the young count. And perceiving the love which Monsieur and Madame de Bressieres bore to their only son, he was not long in making up his mind that in the end the love-sick young man would triumph over the scruples of his parents. He said to himself that when Paul was once safely married, and the two young people had gone off on their bridal trip, it would be necessary for him to leave the chateau, where he had made himself such a pleasant nest, and had grown as fat and comfortable as a worm in a chestnut.

He stood at one of the high windows in his chamber, looking out upon the park. As he surveyed the pleasant, sunlit landscape, and realized the luxury of the life all about him, his mind wandered despairingly back to the miseries of his lot in the city during the preceding winter. He thought of the many wretched nights when he, pale and thin, with dirty linen, rusty coat, broken boots, and frowsy beard, had hastened past the restaurants so as not to be tormented by the appetizing smells that issued from them, and then, after making his dinner off chestnuts, purloined from the fruit-stands of the Chaussee-d'Autin, washed down with water from the city drinking-fountains, had gone to bed on a bench in the Champs-Elysees. One night he had meditated a crime. But his courage had failed him and he had begged instead. He remembered that he had been on the point of sinking to lower depths of infamy when he had received the money from his friend de Bressieres.

"By all the devils," he muttered, gnawing his long mustaches, "I will never go back

to that beggarly existence. Whether Paul marries or not, I'll feather my own nest, or know the reason why."

He rang the bell. Presently Clarot, the groom, appeared. He had been specially assigned to Verdac's service. He was a small youth of sixteen years, with a sharp face and the muzzle of a weasel, and stood very erect in his livery of green cloth with silver buttons.

"Young one," said the baron, "go down to the cellar and bring up one of the bottles of Madeira I've put aside there for my own use."

"Yes, monsieur the baron."

"Be quick about it."

The boy hurried off, and Verdac turned to his toilet-table. Presently the groom returned with a big dusty bottle in his hand. This he uncorked, and pouring out a glass, handed it to the mulatto. The latter raised it to his lips and tipped its contents down his throat with a single gesture.

"Another."

The second he sipped more deliberately, then handed the glass back to be filled again.

"That will take away the taste of the water

from the city fountains that I absorbed so much of last winter."

The adventurer continued to drink until two-thirds of the contents of the bottle had been transferred to his interior. Then he sat down.

"Any news, Clarot?"

"None, monsieur the baron."

"Idiot, you ought to manufacture some."

He took a box of cigars that stood on the table near, and holding them out to the boy, said, roughly:

"Here, you rogue, take one for Ambrose, too."

"Monsieur is very good to us."

"You know pretty Toinette, don't you?"

"Big Pierre's daughter?"

"Yes. Go and tell her to expect me tomorrow morning at about nine."

"Toinette will be very happy, for she is fond of monsieur, and Luinard's Bicquotte will be jealous."

"Get out!"

By and by the count returned to the cha-

teau. He came at once to Verdac's room.

The baron received him ceremoniously.

"Ah, there you are at last," he said coldly.

"Yes, here I am."

"My dear sir," the mulatto proceeded, in a business-like tone, "your family have charged me with a message for you."

"My dear Leonce," said the count, "I beg you not to speak of my father and mother. I've had enough of them for one day."

"What are you going to do?"

"I am going to marry Mademoiselle Chazeau at all hazards."

From his friend's tone and manner, Leonce perceived that it would be dangerous to indulge in a sermon just at present. His voice took a tender, coaxing tone.

"Paul," he murmured, "it is our old friendship that causes me to—"

"I know, I know," interrupted the count impatiently, "but all that you can say, added to all that my parents have already said, will not alter my decision. It is irrevocable."

"Your love is very great then?"

"It is what the love of a gentleman for a

virtuous, beautiful, intelligent, and honorable young woman should be."

"But she does not belong to your world."

"Our world is not as respectable as that of the *bourgeoisie*, I sometimes think."

"To whom are you speaking? When a nobleman falls his fall is the greater because of the height from which he has descended. Ah, my friend, the gentleman who remains honest in the midst of want, is very courageous. I have suffered, and I know. I was in the most abject poverty myself, and yet I remained—"

"Spotless," interjected Paul, seeing the baron at a loss for a word.

"Precisely."

"I am sure of it, my dear Leonce."

"In Paris I have been very hungry at times. I have worked, kept the books of an accountant; I have even run on errands—yes, errands."

"Poor baron! Why did you not come to me?"

"I owed you money already. I didn't like to ask you again."

"That was wrong. But everything is all

right now. Come, give me a glass of Madeira."

"With pleasure, my dear fellow. Ah, I do the honors as if I was in my own home, don't I?"

"You are at home."

"Well, I appear to be, at all events."

"No, you are so. Well, here's your health."

"And yours. And since it seems to be settled, here's good luck to your marriage."

"Thanks."

Paul savoured the wine approvingly as he drank it.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "Where did you find that stuff?"

"In the cellar, to be sure."

"You ought to give my father a taste of it," laughed Paul. "He has never had any, I'll be bound."

The count placed his glass on the table.

"Everything goes more smoothly since you came here, Leonce," he said, cordially.

"Bravo!" said the baron. "Presently you'll be saying that I pay for everything out of my own pocket."

"We have no need of your aid in that regard. But you know how to order the dinner so that we don't get the same things to eat every day, as we used to. The servants both love and fear you. My mother is always citing you as an example for me to follow. I dare say she's not far wrong."

"You are so complimentary, Paul, my lad, that I perceive you are going to ask me to do something for you."

"You are a mind-reader."

"Fire away."

"You'll not betray me?"

"What do you take me for?"

"Well, up to now you have sided against me, and with my parents. Is that not so?"

"It is. But if I can aid in securing your happiness, I may turn about."

"I shall know how to reward you."

"Paul, I am not selling my friendship."

The two young men thereupon separated to dress for dinner. But that night when they had retired to their rooms, they had a long, confidential conversation, the result of which was that, while the old people were slumber-

ing peacefully in their beds, secure in the belief that Leonce was their ally, that facile gentleman was solemnly swearing his allegiance to their son. The young count entertained his friend until a late hour of the night with encomiums upon the lady of his choice, not forgetting to express his admiration for the many charms and virtues of her natural sister, Colette Dumontheil. To all of these confidences the mulatto listened patiently, making mental notes as he went along, for his own future guidance.

"She is a pretty woman, then, this natural sister of Mademoiselle Chazeau, eh, Paul?" he queried, presently.

"Rather too cold and severe for my taste."

"Blonde?"

"No, very dark. The exact image of her father, only handsomer."

"Some washerwoman's child, I suppose."

"I don't know anything about her mother's antecedents."

"Funny thing to do, to take this natural child into the family circle when they had a legitimate daughter. Monsieur Chazeau had

a deal of assurance to think of such a thing. His wife oughtn't to have permitted it."

"On the contrary, she was the one who insisted upon it."

"You don't say so!"

"Mademoiselle Dumontheil is very highly thought of by everybody."

"All the same she will rob your *fiancee* of part of her marriage portion."

"Oh, I don't care anything about that. Monsieur Chazeau will do as he pleases about that matter."

To the astonishment of the marquis and his wife, Monsieur de Verdac took a different tone when he met them the next day. Alas! In spite of all he had done to make Paul change his mind, the young man remained resolute. He declared his determination of awaiting the arrival of his majority, which was not far off, and then carrying his matrimonial plans into execution. The baron was of the opinion that it would be wise to avoid a scandal. There had been many instances of more deplorable *mesalliances* than that proposed by the count. Besides, the whole fam-

ily would not be dishonored because one of their descendants departed from the usual rule in regard to marriage. To be sure, it was unfortunate that Paul had fallen into this entanglement; but, after all, the Chazeaus were a fine old *bourgeois* family, doubtless with some noble blood in their veins. And there was one thing that he wished to specially call to their attention. Paul's nature was so impulsive, so ungovernable, that really some dreadful misfortune might happen if—

“What do you fear?” gasped the marchioness at this point.

“Insanity, madame—or perhaps suicide.”

“Oh, my God,” groaned the poor mother. “That must not be! That must not be! We have only him—only Paul to care for.”

The baron played his cards so well that that very evening he entered his friend's chamber, smiling triumphantly.

“I think I've done the trick,” he said, winking at Paul.

The young man threw himself enthusiastically into his friend's arms.

“Dear Leonce!” he cried, “I owe my hap-

piness to you. I love my parents and I hated to have to use harsh measures with them in this business. But you have spared me the necessity. But I am not going to express my thanks in words alone. Fortune has been hard to you. When I am married I intend—"

"To offer me something in the nature of commission?" interposed the baron in a tone which he did his best to make disdainful.

"Don't be cross with me," continued Paul. "I wish to see you put beyond the fear of want, that's all. But we'll talk about it after my marriage. At present it might seem as if I were offering you payment for your services. And that you would object to, I know."

"Certainly I should."

"Well, you will see. I shall manage to do what I intend to do for you without wounding your susceptible nature in the least. Trust me for that."

"Paul, you are a good fellow."

That night the mulatto spent smoking, dreaming, and drinking. He did some calculating also in a befuddled way.

"Paul will have a million of his own after

he is married," he muttered. "I will make him give me fifty thousand francs which I will receive as a loan, in order that the pride which has come down to me with my royal negro blood may not be insulted. If this Colette is pretty I'll marry her. Chazeau will give her a marriage portion sufficient for my modest merits. So I shall, as it were, become a member of Paul's family, by marrying his sister—by the left hand. Not a bad outlook for an ex-gambling-house *attache*."

A day or two afterward the Marchioness de Bressieres made her first formal call upon the Chazeau ladies.

CHAPTER VIII

"I say, here's great news!" exclaimed Monsieur Leander, entering the kitchen and giving the table, beside which his wife was seated, among the pans and kettles, a great thwack with his cane.

Madame Rouilhat jumped up, with her hand on her heart, as if she had received an electric shock.

"What's the matter? Have you been drinking?" she gasped.

"No, madame."

"You gave me such a start. My heart is in my mouth."

"Oh, that's nothing. But if you only knew!"

"Don't keep me in suspense! Has one of our farmers' barns burned down?"

"Worse than that."

"Has the notary, who has our hundred

and fifty thousand francs on deposit, run away?"

"Worse than that."

"Leander, you torture me!"

"The deuce you say! Well, I'll put you out of misery. Monsieur the Count Paul de Bressieres is going to marry our granddaughter Renee. What do you think of that, old lady? Our money will go spinning now, eh?"

"Is it possible! Can it be true?"

"It is substantially settled."

"The Chazeaus are losing their heads. I shall go straight to Noutron and give them a piece of my mind."

"They'll laugh at you."

"We'll see about that. What does Colette say?"

"She fought against it the best she could. You'll gain nothing by interfering, wife. The Chazeaus are determined to have a taste of the nobility."

The old countryman began to walk up and down the room, which was with him the sign that his mind was busy with some half-formed purpose.

"Do you know, Honorine," he said presently, "that Colette is the only thing that attracts me over yonder?"

"And I, also."

"We behaved rather badly, don't you think, when her father brought her down from Paris?"

"Yes. Do you remember what care the dear child took of me when I was so sick that time? I should have died but for her."

"I love Colette very dearly. They say we get more foolish as we get older. It isn't true. If nothing intervenes to spoil us utterly, we get better gradually, as we go along. When we are old we are like old wines, sweeter and smoother. What do you say, wife, to our adopting Colette? She'd bear a little petting by now, I shouldn't wonder."

He made as if he were carrying a child in his big arms, and, after the manner of the nurses, dandled it, sang to it, and caressed it from time to time—as if he would thus atone for all the wrong he had done the absent girl in times gone by. At dinner they discussed the room they would prepare for their

new daughter. It should be furnished newly with a new carpet and wall paper, in all respects a worthy abiding-place for a young lady. Then they began talking of the Bressieres. Leander knew their financial situation perfectly. They were still rich, he said, but there were heavy mortgages on the estate and half the revenue was eaten up by the large interest account. Besides, the phylloxera had destroyed many of the vineyards and the income was diminishing rapidly from this cause alone. He did not think the young count was exactly a fortune-hunter. He was still rich enough not to care specially for Renee's two hundred thousand francs. It was probably a love-match but it was none the less a risky affair for all that. Young de Bressieres had very expensive habits. The two old people shook their heads dubiously, promising each other that none of their hard-earned wealth should go to enrich the nobility because of this foolish marriage of their grandchild.

"Saturday," the old gentleman said in conclusion, "I will go to Noutron after Colette and we'll keep her here for the rest of our lives."

But the marriage was delayed, after all. Paul was taken ill and for a week Renee did not see him. She began, notwithstanding the assurances of her *fiancee*, to suspect that there was a plot on foot to break off the marriage, and as usual she laid the blame on Colette.

"Mademoiselle Dumontheil," she said to her sister, "you swore to me by the Virgin that you would go away from here."

"I will go to-morrow."

"To-morrow! Always to-morrow! It is a cowardly, wicked shame that you do not go. You dishonor me and my family. My *fiancee* is about to desert me because he cannot put up with your presence, which is a disgrace to the house."

That day as Monsieur Chazeau was getting ready to go to court, his wife said to him:

"Louis, I want to speak to you about the girls. Colette has something on her mind, I can tell by her face. I am afraid Renee has been teasing her again. But she will say nothing to me. Only something in her manner disquiets me."

"Renee is becoming insupportable with her vanity and her jealousy!" exclaimed the lawyer, angrily. "I, too, have observed something strange in Colette's manner. This morning, when she kissed me, she was laboring under some strong emotion. She said nothing, but I could not help thinking that her kiss was like those she gives me when I am going away on a journey. Keep a strict watch over her, Anna, I beg of you."

"I will, Louis. No harm shall come to her."

The kind woman in fact kept such a close watch on the movements of Colette that the young girl found it impossible to steal away from the house and see the superintendent of schools about a place as teacher as her intention had been. She dared not write him, for he was acquainted with Monsieur Chazeau. She could not ask the superintendent to say nothing to her father on the subject, for he would find in this request a suspicious circumstance that would prevent him from yielding to her entreaties for a place. She must contrive some way to make him believe that she had

her father's authorization to become a candidate.

All the morning Renee had been cross and irritable. She scarcely ate any breakfast and, after that meal, went out into the garden, where Colette found her dreamily surveying the landscape, which is in truth one of the most beautiful in Perigord. Stealing up behind her, Mademoiselle Dumontheil murmured in the caressing voice which she always adopted in speaking to her younger sister:

"Is it not very lovely, Renee dear?"

Mademoiselle Chazeau shrugged her shoulders impatiently and, pointing to a clump of trees on the bank of the River Nauve where it disappeared in the convolutions of the distant hill, said bitterly:

"I would I were dead and buried under those trees, yonder."

That evening the two girls went to bed about eleven o'clock. Madame Chazeau and her mother-in-law were out at some small social gathering. The attorney was busy with his books in his office. During the

evening Renee's manner toward her sister had entirely changed and poor Colette felt her heart grow light within her under the influence of her sister's smiles. She hurried to undress and was already in bed before Renee had got her dress unbuttoned. Mademoiselle Chazeau's manner had become suddenly awkward since their arrival in their bedroom.

"I am not sleepy," she exclaimed of a sudden. "I believe I'll go downstairs and see if I can't find some cakes. We'll have a little supper together up here. What do you say, Colette?"

Without waiting for an answer, she ran out, and Colette could hear her hastily descending the stairs. Presently she returned, bearing a plate of cakes in her hand. As she shut the door behind her, she looked fearfully out into the hall, as if she dreaded lest some one had followed her.

"Here we are," she said, advancing and placing the plate on a table near the bed. "I couldn't find any preserves. But the cakes are nice. Have some."

Then she was seized with a fit of nervous

trembling, though the night was rather warm than otherwise. She held a cake out to Colette but her hand shook so that the morsel dropped on the carpet.

"Mother will scold you," said Colette. "Besides, I am not hungry."

"Oh, you must eat some, now that I've been to all this trouble. Here, try this—this is lovely."

"Why, how pale you are!" said Colette, for the first time observing her sister's agitation.

"Oh, no—not at all. Here, eat this macaroon. I could eat three dozen of them if I had them. Isn't it nice?"

Colette had scarcely tasted the cake before she was seized with a nausea.

"What is it? What have you given me?" she exclaimed.

Then the other, losing all control of herself, cried savagely:

"I told you, you had better go. You might know I would stop at nothing."

"Have you poisoned me?"

"Yes."

"Unhappy girl!"

Of a sudden Renee broke down. The enormity of her crime seemed to strike her conscience for the first time. She fell upon her knees at the bedside and hid her face in the clothes. Then she began to cry piteously.

"Yes, I am a wretch," she sobbed—"worse, a criminal, a murderess! Oh, I don't want you to die! I don't want you to die! I was crazy! Help! Help!"

"Be quiet," said Colette, getting out of bed. "There is no danger. You did not give me enough to kill me. Poor girl! Poor girl! How your love for your *fiancee* must have made you suffer since it drove you to the thought of murder!"

"I am a miserable wretch," moaned Renee in the bedclothes.

Colette dressed herself rapidly. When she had donned her hat and coat she deposited the remainder of the poisoned cakes in her pocket. Then she approached her still kneeling sister, and pressing a kiss upon her brow, hastily left the room.

At the sound of the closing door Renee started up. Seeing herself alone in the room, she began to wring her hands and cry:

“Colette! Colette! Where are you, Colette? I am afraid!”

Getting no reply to this appeal Renee at last became terribly frightened. She ran out into the hallway and began to shriek for help. In a few moments the whole household surrounded her, impressed with the idea that the house was on fire.

“What’s the matter? Where is it?”

“Colette!” sobbed the young girl, “Colette has gone away!”

Then she drew her father and mother into her chamber and told them what she had done. Her parents thought that she had suddenly gone mad. But Renee’s story was circumstantial. She told them when and where she had procured the poison, how she had, unknown to Margaret, concealed it in the kitchen, and how she had made a pretext to go and get some cakes so that she and Colette could have a little supper together, how she had spread the poison on some of the cakes and afterward forced one of them on Colette.

“But what did you want to kill her for?” asked her father, horror-stricken.

"Because—because as long as Colette was here, Monsieur de Bressieres would not come here any more."

Monsieur Chazeau's anger at this confession was terrible. He would have struck Renee, but his frightened wife interposed and got her daughter out of his presence before he could carry his intention into execution.

Search was at once made for Colette. It was discovered that the front door was unlocked. She had gone away from the house, undoubtedly. Monsieur Chazeau believed that she had gone to Paris. He ordered out the horse and carriage and drove with all speed over to Thiviers.

Meanwhile Colette was speeding along the high-road as rapidly as her strength and the excitement under which she was laboring could carry her. Two belated peasants, slightly the worse for drink, saw her coming up and drew aside to let her pass.

"It is the devil's wife," muttered one, crossing himself.

"The devil's grandmother!" cried the other, tightening his hold on his stick.

But the dark figure went by without stopping to molest the peasants. At the top of the hill near Neimard's mill the young girl stopped for breath. She was crying, partly with excitement and partly with fear of the lonely way. The idea of retracing her steps came to her, but at the thought of the cruel death she had just escaped at the hands of her sister she flew on again. The moon rose and silvered the landscape all about her. She found herself presently on the road that led to Saint-Front.

In the early morning the Rouilhats heard a faint tapping at their window. Madame Hon-orine opened it and started in astonishment.

"Leander!" she cried. "See here. It's Colette."

"Colette?" cried the old man, jumping out of bed.

"Yes, she is crying, too."

"They have sent her away. Come in—come in, Colette. There—there! Come and give us a kiss. Don't cry! Don't cry! I hate to hear you crying."

And the big, old fellow began to blubber



"BUT THE DARK FIGURE WENT BY WITHOUT STOPPING TO MOLEST THE PEASANTS."

himself as he held the frightened girl in his arms.

That morning after breakfast Monsieur Rouilhat sent for all the servants to come into the dining-room, to whom he presented Collette.

“Henceforward she is our daughter,” he said. “She will be your mistress—your queen—do you hear?”

CHAPTER IX

The next day the minds of Monsieur and Madame Chazeau were relieved by the receipt of the news that Colette had gone to Saint-Front. Monsieur Leander wrote them the following brief note:

“Whether you like it or not, Colette is going to stay with me hereafter.”

A long and painful consultation between the husband and wife resulted in the conclusion that it was better for all that the fugitive should remain in the place of refuge that she had sought of her own accord, after her sister's desperate attempt upon her life. Renee's crime they determined to conceal from all the world and especially from her grandparents. They knew they could count on the loyalty of Colette to this end. Accordingly a note was despatched to Saint-Front giving their formal consent to the adoption of Colette by the Rouilhats.

Soon after this the gossips of Noutron began to be busy with the rumors of the approaching marriage of Mademoiselle Renee Chazeau to the young Count de Bressieres. The affair even got into politics. The republicans thought it strange that the attorney, who was to be their candidate for the general assembly at the approaching election, should give his daughter to a noble who would be a strong supporter of his royalist opponent. As for the Mareuil ladies, to hear them talk one would have thought their nephew was about to marry into the criminal classes, though they did not dare to assail the character of their neighbors directly.

The lawyer maintained a discreet silence, contenting himself with assuring his friends that he should remain true to his republican principles. He had not, he said, sought the alliance, but had yielded to the desires of his daughter. If his daughter's happiness would be promoted by her marriage to young Count de Bressieres he did not think he had the right to let his personal feelings or his political opinions stand in the way.

The Bressieres had more serious evils to contend against, for they found themselves stricken out of the testamentary dispositions of the Mareuils, a couple of old maids who had very strict ideas on the subject of family pride and duty.

"I think I know," said Renee to Paul, one day just before their marriage, "why you hesitated to speak to me for so long. There were two reasons, were there not? The first was because we do not belong to the aristocracy, and the second—"

"Well, and the second?" queried her lover, seeing her hesitate.

"Was because I have a natural-born sister."

But Paul, somewhat to her surprise, hastened to correct her on this latter point.

"I have many faults," he said, "but I have one virtue—candor."

"Yes?"

"Very well. I admit there was some truth in your first supposition. I did fear a quarrel with my family if I should propose to them what we so foolishly call in these times a

mesalliance. But the other reason would have made me more anxious, if anything, to unite my family with yours. I have always respected your father on account of his talents and his probity. But I have loved him ever since I heard the story of Mademoiselle Dumontheil's entry into the family. And I like her ever so much, too. She is very fond of you, do you know? Your ears would tingle with pleasure could you hear her speak about you. Why did she leave you?"

"My grandfather Rouilhat insisted on having her with him."

"What a remarkable old gentleman that grandfather of yours is! He almost showed me the door the other day when I went to invite him to our marriage."

"Why didn't you knock him down?"

The wedding was a simple affair. This was the desire of both families. And they had their way in spite of the wishes of the bride, who had dreamed of a splendid ceremony, of gilt coaches, gorgeous liveries and the street in front of the house strewn with flowers.

But in view of the general objections she thought it best to give way on this point. Her disappointment, however, was keen and rankled within her.

Colette was maid of honor and the Baron de Verdac was best man. The latter did his best to ingratiate himself with Mademoiselle Dumontheil. After the wedding, he prevailed on the Marchioness de Bressieres to go to the Rouilhats with a formal offer of his hand to their adopted daughter. The old lady's mission met with a very frigid reception, but this did not prevent the gallant baron from presenting himself in person a few days later to press his suit. He was met by the redoubtable Leander, who rejected the baron's offer in the following perfectly frank but somewhat unceremonious terms:

"Our Colette will never be yours, my lad."

This blunt refusal from the old farmer greatly outraged the stalwart Leonce, who thereupon responded:

"Indeed! Well, it's as well for you to know then, old man, that I was not at all in earnest. I was only joking with you and with her."



"WHY, YOU BLACK RASCAL, WHAT DO YOU MEAN?"

"Why, you black rascal, what do you mean?" cried Leander, in a towering rage.

He straightway set upon the mulatto so furiously that, by the time some farm-hands arrived and dragged him off, the big Parisian was reduced to a state of unconsciousness. He was resuscitated, his wounds bound up and he was packed into a carriage and driven over to the chateau where he arrived breathing vengeance. But his ideas in that direction never came to anything, for he straightway found himself called to go up to Paris to prepare the new home of the young couple for their reception upon the completion of the wedding journey.

For the next three years Count Paul and his wife resided in a sumptuous hotel in the Rue Saint-Dominique. The baron procured everything for them, even the servants. He hired two coachmen, a *chef* and three aids in the kitchen, a Swiss, a cellarman, a valet, and a maid, all of whom remained devoted to the baron during their continuance in the count's service. Paul thought there were too many of

them and that the hotel was too costly for his income. But Renee urged him with her sweetest cajoleries to keep it. She said that people of their rank and fashion must keep up appearances. If it was necessary to retrench, let it be in some other direction. She did not suggest precisely how they should retrench but she made it apparent that in her opinion it ought not to be in the direction of her own wardrobe. Paul was weak and fond and lazily brought himself to sanction all the engagements Verdac had made in his name, saying to himself that one day he would be a very rich man. The mulatto was the constant adviser of Renee in selecting the furnishings of the house, receiving secret commissions from all the dealers to whom he brought the young country girl.

In course of time Renee became the mother of a pretty baby. But she was too fond of the pleasures of society to devote herself to her maternal duties. So the little one was packed off to her mother at Noutron.

At first, the aristocratic faubourg was disposed to turn a cold shoulder to the young

count, because of his plebeian marriage. But presently one needy gentleman after another, with their wives, permitted their haughty feelings to be softened by the wealth and the luxurious style of living of the *parvenu*. The men admired her beauty and grace; and before long she got the better of the jealousies of the women by her good nature and because they were compelled to look upon her as a person of the strictest virtue.

Under the guidance of Verdac, Paul became a regular habitue of several clubs where he took to gambling for high stakes. He frequented the races and backed courageously, if not always wisely, the horses he fancied. Worst of all, he became involved with a certain Blanche de Ramily, a somewhat famous member of that class of women whom Carlyle felicitously and humorously denominates "unfortunate females."

The countess had her box at the opera and the Theatre Francais. The society papers numbered her among the most fashionable women of the faubourg. Renee was so proud of this that she sent copies of the leading papers

to her family each week, marking her own name wherever mentioned. She found this a very convenient mode of conducting the correspondence on her side. She scarcely gave herself the trouble to write a personal letter once a month to inquire after her child's health. In this way her parents could observe her—from afar—during the winters at the fashionable city gatherings; and during the summers they could follow her from watering-place to watering-place in the columns of the "Figaro."

Madame de Bressieres took riding lessons and became an excellent horsewoman. She played the piano and waltzed beautifully. With monkey-like mimicry, she copied the vocal modulation, the carriage and the facial expression of the other fashionable women by whom she was surrounded. She toned down her impetuous country manners. She molded herself, morally and physically, upon the fashionable model. If she blushed or turned pale she did so in a moderate, ladylike way. Her strong young limbs accustomed themselves to an aristocratic languor of motion. Her mind

lost all independence of thought. She learned how to simper and titter behind her fan so that you could not have told her from a *mondaine* "to the manner born." In short, this young rustic maiden, who had possessed in her country home at least some originality of character, by systematic endeavor gradually succeeded in making of herself one of those dolls of society who have no distinguishing trait unless it be that they all look and behave exactly alike. The fashionable doll has neither head nor heart, neither morals nor affections, and what principles it possesses it puts on and off with its skirts, which it is continually changing.

Verdac had rooms in the Rue de Londres. He had long since spent the fifty thousand francs which his friend's marriage had brought him. He lived now upon money which the countess lent him, without the knowledge of her husband. From time to time he made love to the lady. But it should be said that Renee, who was in truth much in love with her husband, received his advances with little favor.

"Do you dare to tell me," she would say, "that all fashionable women have lovers?"

"Certainly they have. I give you my word of honor."

"I don't believe it. I have none and I don't want any. We'll remain just good friends, if you please. Otherwise you must go away and stay away."

As Madame de Bressieres' so-called loans were his sole means of livelihood the mulatto concluded to accept the lady's hint, at least for the present, and to curb his desire for this specially forbidden fruit.

The happy days and months followed each other in rapid succession, while the count's fortune gradually poured itself out through the four gaps which yawned wider and wider as time went on—the expenses of the man about town, the luxury of the wife, the luxury of the mistress, and the secret but persistent borrowing of the friend.

During the exposition of 1878 the marquis and marchioness came to Paris to visit their children. They were followed in due course

by the Chazeaus. Even the Rouilhats, though not expected, put in an appearance, accompanied by Colette, who had persuaded them to make the journey, much against their will. The old people would not stay more than a day, however, at the hotel in the Rue Saint-Dominique, so incensed were they at the treatment they received there at the hands of their granddaughter. They took lodgings in the city which they occupied while they were visiting the exposition. When they came to go home nothing Colette could say would induce them to go and bid their granddaughter good-bye. But they went to see the *concierge*, Angela Reboul, who had been so kind to Colette on the occasion of the death of her mother.

"Colette," said Monsieur Leander, "I want you to take us to see that *concierge* about whom you have spoken to us so often. I've got something for her."

Arrived there, Colette introduced the old people to her former friend, who straightway inquired after her father's health.

"Her father?" broke in the old peasant farmer, "I am her father."

"You? Oh, no. I know Monsieur Chazeau. He has changed a good deal in the last fourteen years, I dare say, but not as much as that."

"All the same I am her father, I tell you, *concierge*."

Then he drew a fat pocket-book from the recesses of his great-coat and took therefrom a large roll of bills.

"Here," he continued, handing the latter to the astonished woman, who could scarcely believe the evidence of her senses, "here is something for you to make curl-papers with, if you choose. Nothing is too good for anyone who has been kind to my Colette. She is a beauty, eh? Look at her. Ho-ho, a perfect rose-bud! Give us a kiss, Colette, and hand this stuff over to your friend."

CHAPTER X

Life passed smoothly away with Monsieur and Madame Chazeau at Noutron, while Renee's little boy, who had been christened Louis Raymond, after his two grandfathers, grew in grace and beauty. He was the pet of his grandmother and great-grandmother. His Aunt Colette drove in from Saint-Front once a week to kiss and play with him. The Marchioness de Bressieres became a constant visitor at the Chazeaus, for she also had fallen very much in love with her pretty grandchild. Finally, old Margaret, the cook, brought up the rear of this procession of female worshipers at the shrine of the new household god. The attorney, who had made up his mind to leave politics alone, enjoyed the quiet and peace of his home to the utmost. Now that his mind was definitely set at rest about Renee's future, by her brilliant marriage to the heir of the Bressieres, he turned his attention

to securing the happiness of his natural daughter. But the old land-speculator would have none of his interference in Colette's affairs.

"Son-in-law," the mayor of Saint-Front would say, when Monsieur Chazeau broached the subject, "you had full swing in placing your legitimate daughter where it seemed good to you. I beg you to leave me and my old lady to take care of the future of our adopted daughter."

"But I have laid aside a marriage-portion for Colette."

"Thank you. We don't need it. We will take care of that ourselves."

At his home at Saint-Front the old fellow, who was crabbed enough everywhere else, always did his best to be pleasant and agreeable, because he knew that would please Colette.

"Colette, my child, I'm looking out for a husband for you," he would observe, with a chuckle.

"Thank you, I don't wish one," the girl would answer, blushing.

"What would you say, on general principles now, to a notary, eh?" the old man would persist, enjoying her confusion and admiring her coloring immensely.

"Oh, as well as another. But I'm very happy as I am."

"Hah! That's worth knowing. Still, you are not cut out for an old maid, my dear."

"Well, there's plenty of time yet, Monsieur Leander."

"I thought I told you not to call me 'monsieur'."

"Yes, father," meekly.

"That's better, eh, Honorine?"

"What, Monsieur Leander?"

Whereupon the worthy mayor of Saint-Front would fly into a rage with his wife for calling him "monsieur" also. He would declare that she did it to make fun of him—which was quite true—and would then remind her with great dignity that the gentry and nobility of the neighborhood were in the habit of addressing him as "monsieur" in sober earnest on account of the office of mayor of the commune which he had held for so many

years. This fit of temper would last until Colette would come to him and, laying her smooth cheek against his bearded one, would coax him back to good humor again.

All of a sudden, Renee began to write to her parents from Paris for money. These demands became more and more pressing, until, finally, Monsieur Chazeau declared that he would send no more. Then Renee wrote to Colette to intercede for her. By the prayers of the latter some few thousand francs more were wrung from the already embarrassed attorney and found their way to Paris.

Colette, urged thereto by her sister, undertook also to interest the Rouilhats in the affairs of their granddaughter. But she was utterly unsuccessful in this direction.

"So they've broken down at last!" the old farmer exclaimed with a chuckle of evil enjoyment when Colette informed him of the straitened financial circumstances of the Bressieres. "I wonder how lawyer Chazeau likes the nobility business, now."

Paul and Renee addressed themselves to their respective families for means to carry

on their extravagant mode of life. Each promised reformation and a more economical household in the future, but both were pressing in their demands for present assistance, so much so, indeed, that they frequently overshoot the mark. One day, Madame Chazeau received a letter from her daughter. Colette and old Madame Clorinde were both in the room when the servant brought it in.

"Read it to me, please, Colette," Anna said, handing the note over to the latter.

Colette read as follows:

"Mamma:—I know why father is so stingy toward me. He is robbing me of my rights for Colette's sake and Colette is robbing my grandparents—"

Anna snatched the letter out of the young woman's hand, glanced hastily over it and threw it into the fire, her own face red with anger and mortification. Colette hung her head while the tears came to her eyes. Madame Chazeau came to her and took her in her arms.

"Do not cry, dear," she said, "Renee is a wicked, wicked girl."

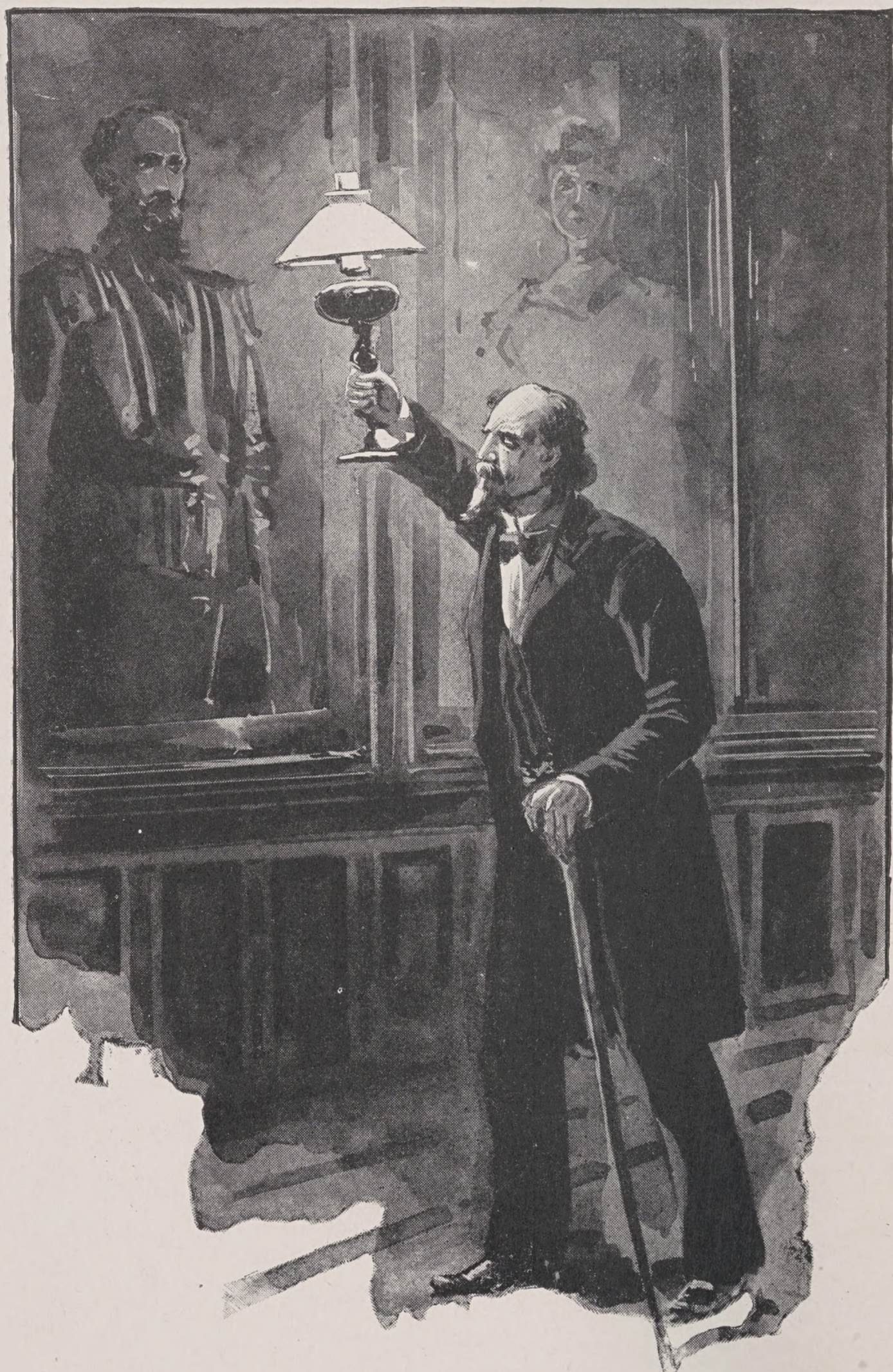
"I tried to get money from them for her," sobbed the poor girl on Anna's bosom, "but they would not listen to me."

"What does that hare-brained creature want now?" asked Madame Clorinde.

"She wants a greater sum, by far, than she has ever dared to ask for before. Twenty thousand francs! Her father will not think of sending it to her."

Nevertheless, that afternoon Mademoiselle Dumontheil persuaded her father to go to the bank with her. Afterward, with a happy smile upon her face, she accompanied him to the postoffice to see him dispatch a portentous-looking letter to the address of Madame de Bressieres in Paris.

At the chateau at Saint-Front things were meanwhile going from bad to worse. Piece by piece the Bressieres had sold off their lands, Rouilhat, unknown to them, being the purchaser. Paul's demands for money were unintermitting. They were couched in such terms as made it impossible for these people of noble birth and tender sensibilities to ignore them. He represented to them that unless



"SOMETIMES AT NIGHT HE WOULD TAKE A LAMP IN HIS HAND AND SURVEY THE PORTRAITS OF HIS ANCESTORS."

they came to his aid he must be forever dishonored. He asked them if they would like to see their only son a pensioner upon his wife's bounty. These representations, accompanied by profuse promises of reform, and vows that he would in the near future rescue their fortunes from ruin by his own exertions, extracted at last all the substance of the old people. Their lands, with the exception of the demesne about the chateau, were all sold off. They still kept one horse and an old carriage. The marquis parted with his rare collection of curios and the marchioness with her jewels. The gardener and his wife were now the only servants about the place. The old marchioness carried her troubles to God and found consolation there, but the marquis grew thinner and weaker day by day as the load of care pressed heavier upon him. He never went out in the daytime now. Sometimes at night he would take a lamp in his hand and, going into the picture gallery, survey, one after the other, the portraits of his ancestors hanging there. Sometimes he would go out and walk in the grounds in the moon-

light, and return to the house, pale and haggard, after having heard some peasants gossiping upon the highway, about the value of the trees in the park, and the building material of the chateau. In his mind's eye, the poor old gentleman could see the arms of the workmen already lifted for the sorrowful task of demolition. He could hear the axes and mattocks at their devastating work, under the orders of big Leander. He would stand, for a long time, with his hands pressing against the massive walls of the house as if he would thus, by his own weak interposition, prevent them from falling to the ground. Almost every day he would get some threatening or dunning letter from the city, like the following, for instance:

PARIS, December 15, 1880.

Monsieur the marquis:—I have the honor to call upon you—agreeably to the suggestion of your son—for payment of several notes of hand, amounting in all to one hundred and forty thousand francs. Your son is unable to give me any satisfactory guarantee of payment. This is the last appeal I shall make to

you. If I do not hear from you within a week I shall let the law take its course.

Respectfully,

AMBROSE MACLARD.

No. 292 Rue du Faubourg-Montmartre.

To this letter Monsieur de Bressieres, in a towering rage, replied:

“Go to the devil! I have bled all I can. I will not bleed any longer.”

Monsieur Maclard, who was a usurer, originally from Normandy, now in Paris in the service of a firm of Frankfort Jews, read this curt note in the privacy of his business office and smiled sardonically when he had finished its perusal.

“Let me see,” he said, “my attachment against young de Bressieres’ assets comes in after several bills of sale and one or two other attachments. Hum! If I don’t look out I shan’t get all of my money. His father won’t make himself responsible for the debt, it seems. Very good. Then he shall pay it in cash. Yes, I think I see a way to make the old man bleed although he thinks he is already run dry. Ho-ho!”

CHAPTER XI

It was Christmas morning. A raw, cold wind was blowing down the valley of the Dorne, stirring up the mists which hung heavily over the river like a great lead-colored blanket. It being a holiday, all sounds of labor had ceased in the country-side. The merry tic-tac of the grist-mills was hushed. Only the dolorous sound of the water falling over the mill-dams seemed to unite in itself the expression of the universal suffering, sorrow, anguish, not only of humanity, but of all that lives.

The priest was just finishing mass in the little church at Saint-Front. A number of the country people had already made their exit, and these now collected around a big, red-faced man clad in gray, with a tall hat and a fur-bound overcoat, who began haranguing them. Behind this man stood the village drummer, drum-sticks in hand and drum on

stomach, waiting for the word of command to commence beating. Meanwhile he was busily engaged in spelling out the words printed on a large placard affixed to the back of the red-faced man in front of him.

"It's a cheap-jack," whispered one farmer to another, with a jog of the elbow.

"No. He hasn't got anything to sell. Where's his wagon?"

"No," chimed in a third, "he's not sharp enough looking for a cheap-jack."

The red-faced man was no other than Monsieur Ambrose Maclard, money lender, late of Normandy, now of the Rue du Faubourg-Montmartre of Paris.

"Monsieur and Madame de Bressieres will come out among the last, they tell me," said Monsieur Maclard to the drummer, who was evidently in his employ.

"Yes, sir. They have to pass through the entire church, for their seats are up near the altar."

"He is a tall man, isn't he?"

"Yes, sir—tall and thin—with a white beard. You can't fail to recognize him. A very fine man is monsieur the marquis."

"That is not the point. The point is that he must pay me what he owes me—or his son—it's all the same. Bellow with all your might when you come to read the placard. Your regular charge is ten sous, you say, and remember I am going to give you twenty francs."

"Thank you, sir."

Some of the people began to read the placard and repeated to each other a name which they found there. This was whispered through the crowd as the designation of the man who stood in front of them. Bystanders commenced to take liberties with the red-faced man and his drummer both, plucking at their coats, tilting their hats over their eyes, thumping the drum with their fists, and so forth. But Monsieur Maclard and his assistant bore these small trials imperturbably, the drummer for the sake of the twenty francs and the note-broker for the sake of the faith that was in him that he was about to make the Marquis de Bressieres bleed in spite of himself.

Presently Maclard raised his cane and

twirled it rapidly round in his fingers after the fashion affected by drum-majors.

"Rub-a-dub-dub—Rub-a-dub-dub," went the drummer.

"Halt," was the next order. "Come here, all."

On this invitation the crowd, now amounting to several hundred persons—for the church had emptied itself and the Marquis de Bressieres and his wife were visible on the porch, waiting for an opening to be made for their passage—pressed closely about the red-faced man and waited curiously for what he had to say. Whereupon the drummer began reading in a loud tone of voice the following proclamation from the placard affixed to his employer's back:

"For sale to the lowest bidder, at a heavy loss, twenty notes of hand of Monsieur the Count Paul de Bressieres, son of Monsieur the Marquis Raymond de Bressieres, of the chateau of Bressieres. These notes, which the Bressieres refuse to pay, amount to the large sum of one hundred and forty thousand francs. The bearer of this placard, poor devil,

is the owner of the notes, and he is willing to dispose of them for anything he can get—even a crust of bread. To such desperate straits has he been reduced by this family.

“Those wishing to purchase will apply to Monsieur Ambrose Maclard of Paris, the man who stands in front of me, and whom this noble family is sending to the poor-house together with his wife and four little children.

“Monsieur Maclard is staying at the Saint-Front inn. Come one, come all. All these promises to pay of the Bressieres family for just a crust of bread!”

By this time Madame de Bressieres was weeping with humiliation and vexation in the church porch. The old marquis forced his way through the crowd and seized Maclard by the collar.

“You scoundrel!” he exclaimed, hoarse with passion, “you shall be paid, but I forbid you to insult me here before my people.”

Whereupon four or five small creditors of the old gentleman thought themselves justified in advancing their claims.

“And us?” they cried. “Will you pay us?”

"I have sold all I have to satisfy your claims," he groaned.

"Everything?"

"Yes, everything."

"He lies!" cried some one in the crowd.

"He is afraid of this Parisian and is going to settle with him. But we shall never be paid."

"That's wrong!" cried several. "The marquis isn't the man to cheat anybody."

"The marquis is a good man."

"His wife is a saint."

"They are robbers."

"To the river with them."

These various cries indicated a decided difference of opinion in the crowd as to the old marquis' financial integrity. The two factions began straightway to abuse each other. Abuse was followed by pushings and haulings and these by blows. One of those terrible outbursts of popular fury seemed impending such as characterized the conduct of the peasants who, for instance, on the fifteenth of August, 1870, set upon the young gentleman in the market of the neighboring town of Haute-faye and burned him alive.

The party of the creditors seemed to far outnumber the friends of the Bressieres. The cries of "To the river" grew more numerous and threatening each moment. The two old people stood in imminent peril of bodily harm when a former servant of the chateau sprang in front of the marquis, and brandishing a large knife in the face of his assailants, exclaimed:

"I'll rip up the first man that touches him!"

Some of the former tenants of the Bressieres estates ranged themselves alongside this man, and a gigantic young cuirassier on furlough, son of farmer Giron, nearly killed one of the most excited of the creditors by a blow of his big fist. Further trouble was averted by the arrival of the mayor, Monsieur Rouilhac, in all the glory of his tri-colored sash of office. The appearance of this functionary put a stop to the incipient riot. The late disputants gradually dispersed, wrangling somewhat as they went. When they were left alone along Maclard lifted his hat ceremoniously to the marquis and said:

"Monsieur the marquis, I trust to your word of honor."

Then he walked away down the street to his inn followed by his drummer. That evening he was closeted with Monsieur Rouilhat in his room. The two worthies were discussing the merits of a bottle of the native wine and had under its warming influence become very good friends.

"You will pardon me, Monsieur Normandy, for not having asked you to my own house."

"Oh, I understand perfectly, Monsieur Perigord. Your letter was quite explicit. You wish to become the possessor of the chateau of Bressieres without being known in the business."

"Yes—you see it's a family matter."

"Will Monsieur Perigord take up his residence in the chateau?"

"No, Monsieur Normandy. Monsieur Perigord is going to pull the old barracks down."

That same evening, as the Chazeaus were at tea, the Marquis de Bressieres was announced. When he entered, both husband and wife arose, startled at the unnatural pallor of the old gentleman's face.

"Our children!" they both exclaimed, animated by the same thought.

"Lost! Lost!"

"Dead?"

"Worse than dead—dishonored."

And the old man would have fallen to the floor had the attorney not sustained him on his strong arm.

Three days afterward the chateau became the property of Monsieur Ambrose Maclard, acting as the agent of Monsieur Rouilhat. The Bressieres were given a month to move out.

About this time, the old farmer came to Colette and said:

"I have found a husband for you, my dear."

"Who?"

"A notary of Piegnt."

"I am sorry to hear you say so. I don't want to marry."

"Not with a half million for marriage portion?"

"No, I can't think of marrying while my sister is so unhappy."

"Unhappy! Well, whose fault is it, I'd like to know?"

The afternoon after this conversation Monsieur Chazeau and Mademoiselle Dumontheil took the train at Thiviers bound for Paris. They were alone in their compartment. As the train sped along Colette leaned her head on her father's shoulder and said:

"Father, do you remember that journey, years ago, when you held in your arms a little girl all dressed in black? Do you remember the dear words you spoke to her? 'Do not call me sir. Call me papa,' you said. Then you asked 'Are you afraid?' I looked at you and shook my head. For you seemed to me so kind, so good, that I would have followed you to the end of the world."

"My dear, dear daughter."

"You were my papa-mamma, then. You warmed my little cold hands in yours. You tucked me under the covers you had brought and you made me forget my grief by telling me some wonderful stories, I remember. When you thought I was asleep you hardly stirred for fear of waking me."

"But you don't tell what happened afterward, my poor child. What a life of humiliations I was bringing you to!"

"I have nothing to remember of all that time except your love and the goodness of Mamma Chazeau and of grandmamma. But I love best to think of that night. You asked if mamma ever spoke your name in anger, and I said 'my mother was not naughty' and then you said—and oh, there was such a tremble in your voice when you said it—you said, 'I am not naughty either, Colette; you will see how I shall love you.' Do you remember?"

She glanced up into her father's face, and, as if prompted thereto by the look of anxiety she saw in the kindly eyes, she drew her arms about his neck and, clinging to him, whispered in his ear not to be down-hearted, that she, Colette, the little black-robed girl of long ago, would never rest until she had rescued her sister from the ruin that had come to her life. She could and she would soften the grandfather's heart toward Renee.

CHAPTER XII

Count Paul and his friend Baron de Verdac dined that same evening with the actress, Blanche de Ramily, at her hotel in the Rue de Berlin. During the course of the dinner, the latter referred to the fact that she and Paul were going to a ball that night.

"When do you start?" queried the baron, carelessly.

"My carriage will be at the door at ten."

"And it's half past eight now," said Verdac, swallowing the last drops from his cup of black coffee. "Well, I'll be off, then. I know you women like plenty of time to dress. I suppose you'll not be going yet, eh, Paul?"

"No," said the count, somewhat gruffly. He was looking careworn and haggard. His financial difficulties, which had now reached a crisis, had changed the former sunny-tempered young fellow into an irritable, morose man of the world. He had gradually drawn more

and more into himself and now hardly spoke at all, except when directly addressed. Long brooding over his troubles had resulted in his becoming that most unfortunate of mortals—a man who condoles with himself.

The woman with whom the baron had left him was one of the famous women of her class. She was a large, bronze-haired creature with a magnificent figure, laughing eyes and vivacious manners. She had been a queen of the Amazons in one of the Chatelet spectacular plays when the young count had first beheld her. Since then, as has been already hinted, the ex-Amazon's luxury had been one of the important factors in working his financial ruin. But he had never been able to shake himself free from her influence, though he had long since been divested of the illusions that had first caused him to fall under it. He knew perfectly well that the divinely fair, divinely tall Juno of the Chatelet was nothing more nor less than a painted doll with an appetite. But the habit of feeding the doll had grown upon him with the years and it was not one of the least of his reasons for self-condolence

that he was now on the point of being deprived of the means of continuing this very silly amusement.

Meanwhile the Baron de Verdac, after taking his leave, had proceeded at once to the hotel in the Rue Saint-Dominique. Here he was informed that the countess, suffering from a slight indisposition, had retired for the night. Going into the library, he wrote a short note which he sent up to the lady by the hands of her maid. A few moments afterward Renee might have been seen in her room, dressing herself in great haste. She was very pale and was evidently laboring under strong excitement.

"Augustine!" she exclaimed to the maid who was assisting, "you must hurry. I never saw you so slow as you are to-night."

The maid, who at first, with the suspicious cunning of her class, had concluded that her mistress was about to go to some rendezvous, now perceived by the tears in her eyes and her feverish manner that the affair was of more serious import. She heard the countess mutter between her clenched teeth: "Coward! Coward! I will kill him."

"Aha!" thought the soubrette, with an inward chuckle, "she is not going to one herself, but she's going to catch the count in one." Then she said aloud:

"Madame appears to be suffering much. Can I do anything to aid madame?"

"No—no. Be still."

"Madame knows how devoted I have been to her interests."

"Yes, girl, yes."

"If madame would but think how much in need I am of—"

"Your wages. Can't you wait until to-morrow?"

"Madame knows that I am poor and cannot afford—"

"You will be paid to-morrow."

"But, madame—"

"To-morrow, to-morrow, I tell you."

Renee rushed from the room and down the stairs. The baron was waiting for her in the hallway. Together they left the house and entered a hired carriage that was waiting for them. The driver whipped up his horses and the vehicle dashed off in the direction of the European quarter.

Renee drew back into one corner of the carriage to keep as far as possible from the baron, who now began to be rather offensively familiar in his language. A dark suspicion crossed her mind.

"Have you dared to deceive me?" she exclaimed, leaning forward and scanning the mulatto's face closely by the light of a street lamp.

"You shall have the proof before the hour is up," said Verdac, grandiloquently.

The countess produced a small revolver from the pocket of her furred dolman.

It was one of those jeweled toys that might have looked well on a chatelaine, but was not intended for very effective service.

"If he has deceived me!" she exclaimed, tragically, "I shall kill him with this. But if you have dared to tell me a falsehood, beware! It will be your turn."

The baron glanced at the weapon in affected concern and then his evil eyes rested hungrily upon the fair face of the would-be Judith.

"Madame," he said, "you ought not to think of inflicting bodily injury upon the

count. If I had supposed for a moment that the affair was going to take a tragic turn, I would not have thought of coming to you. It was only as the friend of both of you that I conceived it to be my duty to speak. You, I believed, could save Paul, and at all events I could not bear to have you deceived longer. Please give me the revolver."

"No."

"Then, let us go back."

"No. I shall go on to the bitter end. I will kill him first and myself afterward."

"Dear madame," persisted the baron, "an accident might happen if you continue to flourish that. Don't you remember how little Marchioness de Valognes killed herself accidentally a few years ago when she was out hunting? She was in the act of jumping her horse over a fence in the woods that was covered by a mass of underbrush. She had her gun in her hand; a twig caught in the trigger and—bang! Poor little woman, how she could waltz! I beg of you, dear madame, to let me have that dangerous weapon."

But the countess was not to be frightened.

She, however, slipped the revolver back into her pocket and promised to be cool and calm. Whereupon Leonce began to make love to her again.

The countess paid little attention to him, however. She remained in her corner of the carriage sunk in painful reflections. She knew that she was quite as responsible as her husband for the financial wreck that had come to them, but she had always respected her wifely honor and remained faithful to her marriage vows, though she had had her temptations, too. And now to learn that over here where they were going—in the Rue de Berlin—her husband had been all these years sinking his own honor as well as his fortune. While she had been fighting—or so she phrased it to herself—to stave off the catastrophe, over here all of her marriage portion and the money obtained from the sale of her jewels had been wasted, poured out upon a—faugh! she could not bring herself to say the word. He had had all the fun, the gayety, the freedom from care. She had had to bear all the worry and the blame, the visits of creditors furious

because of their unpaid bills and proportionately insolent, the sniffs and slights of the servants who put on injured airs because they had not received their wages. Her husband had not even had the decency to conceal his double life; he had permitted his friends to know all about it. For years it had been an open secret to this man who was now leading the martyr-wife to her Calvary.

Paul had left the house that morning upon the pretext of a visit to the court officers to obtain, if possible, a delay in respect to the sale of the household furniture which had been ordered to satisfy some attachments. With tears in his eyes he had said to her:

“Poor, dear girl, we are a very unhappy, unfortunate couple. But be brave. Think of our child. I shall go to America and try my fortune. You shall go back to Noutron to your family. Be of good cheer, my beloved Renee.”

He had kissed her warmly and she had given back his caress with interest, contented, courageous, resigned, since he still loved her. And now, to find that it was all a sham, a deceit, a fraud—

The train of her reflections was here interrupted by the voice of the baron at her side.

"Here we are, madame," he was saying.

"Is this the house?" she asked hastily, looking out of the carriage window.

"That is it—with the light in the window."

"Tell the man to stop then," she said, in a suffocated voice.

"No, we had better wait further down the street."

"Are you afraid?"

"Of your husband?" laughing. "Oh, no. But I remember what you have in your pocket and I don't wish to run the risk of a scandal, of a murder, perhaps."

The carriage stopped a few houses further down the street. From its rear window the front of the house where her erring husband was supposed to be was plainly visible, lighted by a street lamp in front of it. With her face glued to the window-pane she waited and watched in silence. Presently a carriage drew up in front of the door. In a few moments the door opened and two people issued from it—a female figure evidently dressed in ball-

costume and—yes, there could be no mistake about it—Paul, her husband. His hat was drawn down over his eyes and the collar of his overcoat was turned up. But she knew the figure and the walk too well. She turned, and half blinded by the blood that seemed to stream up into her face and eyes from her over-charged heart, turning everything to a horrible crimson, groped for the handle of the door.

“Where are you going?” she heard the baron say. His voice sounded a long way off.

She made no answer but opened the door and placed one foot upon the carriage step. Then a rough hand was laid upon her arm and she felt herself lifted in a pair of muscular arms and drawn back into the carriage. She was crushed against the baron’s breast and felt his bearded lips upon her mouth.

“Renee!” he whispered, passionately.

At the same time she heard the other carriage drive rapidly away.

“Renee,” the baron continued, “your husband has abandoned you for another. Let me be the instrument of your revenge. Be mine.”

She felt in her pocket for the revolver. But at the same moment it was wrenched from her grasp and she heard the baron's voice calling to the coachman to drive on. Then she lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XIII

At about six o'clock the next morning Madame de Bressieres came to the door of the hotel in the Rue Saint-Dominique. She presented a most deplorable appearance. Her clothes were soiled with mud and soaked with rain. Her features were haggard, her hair disheveled and there was a half insane glare in her eyes. She looked long and anxiously at the house and three times turned away from it before she could summon up courage to produce her night-key and let herself in. Then she stood for some moments still and trembling in the dark hallway. All was silent; the household slept. Slowly and painfully she began to creep up the stairs. As she reached the door of her husband's room, which had to be passed before she could arrive at her own chamber, it was suddenly opened from within, and the silhouette of Paul presented itself

against the background of light that issued from the chamber.

"Where have you been?" he said, coldly looking down upon the disheveled figure that crouched before him.

"Kill me," his wife moaned, clasping her hands miserably before her face.

"I think you had better go to your room," was his sole response to this appeal.

"Kill me—for God's sake, kill me!" the wretched woman continued to murmur, supplicatingly.

The count shrugged his shoulders, contemptuously.

"Why should I? It seems to me you are rather worse than dead already."

He turned and entered his room, shutting the door behind him and leaving his wife outside in the darkness. She groped her way to her own chamber and locked herself within.

At nine o'clock Augustine brought a note to her mistress. It read as follows:

"Madame:—To-day I leave the country. Forget me and forgive me. I was unworthy of you. I do not know of what you have

been guilty nor do I seek to know. I simply go away. I leave our child with you. Adieu."

"Has monsieur gone out?" Renec asked the servant.

"Yes, madame. Monsieur instructed his valet to pack his trunks at once."

"Very well. Go."

"Has madame thought of her promise to have me paid?"

"You will get your money to-day without fail."

"Thank you, madame, I rely on your word."

A few moments later Augustine knocked on her mistress' door again.

"What is it?" the countess asked from within.

"Madame's father is below."

"My father!"

"With Mademoiselle Colette."

"Tell them I am suffering and can't see them just now."

"Yes, madame," wonderingly.

"Stay! I believe I am crazy this morning. Ask my father to wait for me below. See that he has something to eat if he has not yet

breakfasted. Ask Mademoiselle Dumontheil to come up here. Tell my father that I have a bad headache and am not yet up."

Presently there was another knock at the door. Renee opened it. Colette stood before her. She held out her arms and the young wife threw herself into them sobbing as if her heart would break. Colette drew her sister within, shut the door, and seated Renee and herself on the bed.

"Poor dear! Poor dear! How you must have suffered," she said, stroking her sister's disheveled hair with her cool palm.

"Oh, Colette!" sobbed the other, "I have been very wicked. Can you forgive me? I have been cruelly punished."

"Yes, I know, dear. Don't cry so. It's all right. There—there! I know you have suffered. But it will all come right. Your fortunes will mend again."

"Oh, I don't mind the money. But Paul—"

"What about Paul?"

"He has left me."

"Impossible!"

"Yes. He leaves the country to-day. Oh,

it is my fault—I have been very, very wicked—but—but not what he thinks, oh, not what he thinks!”

“My dear girl,” Colette began in her resolute way, which was at the same time both gentle and reassuring, “you must tell me about this. It is more serious than I supposed. Your father and I have come after you to take you home. We knew that your money was all gone. Now tell me what worse than that has happened.”

“It was Verdac’s fault.”

“Verdac! Oh, Renee, have you permitted that man at last to come between you and your husband? I have warned you against him for years past.”

“Listen. Verdac came to me last night and told me of my husband’s relations with a famous—or infamous—woman of the theaters. I had long suspected it but I had no proofs. He offered them to me. Tempted by I know not what of mad rage and jealousy, I went with him. He did show me my husband in company with the woman. When I would have left the carriage in which we were to go

to them, he forcibly detained me. I lost consciousness and when I recovered it I found myself walking on the street. The night was very dark and there was a heavy drizzling rain mingled with a fog so thick that I could hardly see a rod in front of me. I did not know in what part of Paris I was nor what time it was until I heard a neighboring clock strike. It was eleven. Then I knew that I had not been long unconscious in the carriage with Verdac. I do not know—I do not dare to think—what his intentions were. But he had evidently become frightened and had deposited me in the street in a half unconscious condition. Then it came to me in what a dreadful position I had placed myself. My husband would never believe me innocent; he would never forgive me for having played the spy upon him. Then I thought of our desperate financial straits—everything gone—house, money, estate, and now my husband lost to me. I suppose I became really insane for a time. I know the thought of suicide came to me. I determined to drown myself.”

“My poor, poor Renee.”

"But I could not find the river. I suppose I spent hours in those terrible streets looking for it. Occasionally some dreadful man or some still more dreadful woman would speak to me and laugh as I hastened away from them. Oh, Colette, I never imagined before what horrible places are the streets of Paris by night! They look so cheerful and bright by day, you'd never think they could be so wicked and dreadful at night. By and by I found myself upon the Pont Neuf. I don't know how I got there but I recognized the place at once. I remember I stood leaning over the parapet for a long time watching the slimy water as it crawled sluggishly along beneath. I was wet through and shivering with cold. I suppose the sense of this made me think of the deadly coldness of the water below and I shrank away from it. Then I thought what a dreadful thing I should be when they fished me out and took me to the morgue, all dead and broken and horrible. And then the people that would gaze at me and the hands that would touch me as I lay there dead! These thoughts drove the cour-

age out of me and finally I crept away from the place. Then I determined to go home. Perhaps my husband would kill me when he saw me. That was my thought. I remember I asked him to. But he only turned away from me contemptuously as if I were dirt from the street. Afterward he sent me this."

Renee handed her sister the note she had received from Paul. Colette glanced it over rapidly and then fixed her steady gaze upon the young wife's face.

"You see what he thinks of me. He despises me and wants to get rid of me. He will despise me more perhaps when he knows the truth. Oh, I do not know what to do! I am too miserable to live and too cowardly to die. Oh! oh! oh!"

Mademoiselle Dumontheil sat silent listening to her sister's lamentations. Renee continued to weep aloud for some time. But gradually her sobs died away until she sat still and dejected upon the bed with her face buried in her handkerchief, an occasional tremor of the shoulders alone marking the continued presence of the storm. Then the

older sister spoke to her in the calm, sweet voice that she remembered so well. Renee thought it strange that she had never before noticed how musical and evenly modulated it was.

"Listen," said Colette; "I know little of life and especially of fashionable life in these big cities. But I put my trust in God and I am sure he will inspire me with the knowledge of how to aid you. Do not weep any more. I feel that the worst is over. Light is at hand."

Presently Augustine came to advise her mistress that the count had returned. Colette descended and found Paul in conversation with her father. She asked the latter to excuse him, telling Bressieres that she wanted a few moments of private conversation with him in the library. Arrived there, she turned to him and said:

"Renee has told me all, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you are doing your wife a great wrong when you suspect her of disloyalty."

"Bah! She left here at half past nine last

night with that black scoundrel Verdac and returned to the house this morning at six. I wonder she took the trouble to return at all. Rats have a way of deserting sinking ships."

"You may thank your God, count, that she did return at all. Otherwise, the remorse of a lifetime would not expiate the wrong you have done her in your thoughts."

"You will excuse me, but important business awaits my attention. I am about to leave the country, as perhaps my wife has told you."

"You must not go until you have seen Renee again and begged her forgiveness."

"I beg forgiveness?"

"Remember where you were last night and with whom."

"So my wife has set spies on me, has she?"

"Not at all. You forget that your intimate friend, the Baron de Verdac, is privy to your wrong-doing. You will pardon me, but I can use no kinder word to characterize it."

"Has Verdac betrayed me?"

"Listen. Baron de Verdac, as you know, was at one time a suitor for my hand. Recently it has been my wish to get at a clear

understanding of how your affairs really stood as I hoped to be able to aid you for my sister's sake. I applied to Verdac. I think you know him well enough to believe that if he could see a personal advantage to himself to be gained by betraying you, he would betray you. I made it worth his while to speak. I have long known the story of your—wrong-doing. Last night, my father and I came up to Paris to take my sister home. We knew your course of life was ended here. I commissioned Verdac to bring Renee to the train to meet us last night. I wished to know what her feelings on the subject were before speaking to you this morning. It seems that after they had left the house last night, the baron, inspired by an unholy passion for your wife, addressed her improperly and had not God interfered to protect her you might indeed be a dishonored husband this morning. Happily she escaped the baron. She was in a distant and unknown part of Paris. She wandered about for hours trying to find her way home. Finally, overcome by the thought that you would believe her guilty when you returned to the hotel and

found her gone off with Verdac, and sick and discouraged with the long struggle against hope of the past few months, she lost her mind and determined to commit suicide. Happily for you, sir, and for all of us, she had not the physical courage to carry out her determination. So she wandered home to you this morning. You remember how you received the poor half-crazed woman. Paul, did I not speak the truth when I said you would not leave the country until you had first seen Renee and begged her forgiveness?"

The young count looked at Colette for a moment, with glistening eyes.

"You are a saint from heaven," he said.

Then he turned and left the room. A moment after she heard his footsteps on the stairs.

CHAPTER XIV

Finally, all of Count Paul's creditors were paid off in full. The principal one was Monsieur Maclard, who received his money through the sale of the chateau, which Monsieur Leander bought in at a price sufficient to indemnify the usurer for his advances, principal and interest. The rest got theirs for the most part out of the proceeds of the sale of the hotel in the Rue de la Saint-Dominique, the horses, carriages and furniture. The balance was made up by Renee's father out of the settlements of his wife and mother and the savings he had laid aside for the marriage portion of Colette. Mademoiselle Dumontheil, on her part, sacrificed her own small economies in order to get some jewelry, that Renee was particularly fond of, out of the pawnshops.

The journey of the father and his two daughters and son-in-law from Paris to Noutron was a melancholy experience for all of

them, notwithstanding Colette's brave endeavors to keep up the spirits of the others. From the station at Thiviers Paul went directly to the chateau, going part way by stage to Pardoux, and the rest on foot. The two girls accompanied their father to his home in Noutron. The next morning they drove out in the carriage to Saint-Front. A sorry trip it was for the young countess. How well she remembered the joy and pride she had experienced when last she had traversed those streets, a bride. She shrunk back into a corner of the old carriage now to avoid the curious glances directed at her from the sidewalks and the windows of the houses—houses which had such a familiar look and yet seemed the abodes of strangers.

Renee was dressed richly in a traveling costume of English woolen cloth, with a coat of otter-skin, a dainty hat of black lace set off with pink azaleas, muff and boa of blue fox, mousquetaire gloves, the last remnants of the luxury which she worshiped so passionately, but which was now forever lost to her. The contrast which her costume presented to the

plain clothes of her tall sister and still more to the shabbiness of the country carryall in which she was riding, brought this latter fact home to her mind more forcibly, and the poor, silly, little, blonde woman could not restrain the tears that would force themselves to her eyes. She put her handkerchief in front of her face and permitted herself the luxury of a good cry.

Meanwhile old Ferdinand, a model of prudence and slowness, was permitting his old mare to take her own time in dragging the despised carryall, with its shabby, rattling hood and its squeaking springs and creaking axle-trees, up the long, wet street. Presently Renee called to him petulantly from behind her handkerchief:

"Ferdinand, get along, will you? I never saw even you so slow before."

"It is Cocotte's fault, mistress. She is very old, you know. I have to be very careful how I drive her."

In the course of time they reached Saint-Front. The two sisters got out at the Rouilhats' while Ferdinand drove on with Renee's

trunks to the chateau. But Renee did not stay long. The old couple, despite the tender supplications of their adopted daughter, received their grandchild coldly, almost brutally. They did not try to conceal the fact that they looked upon her as an interloper or perhaps even an enemy. So she was glad enough to make her escape when Ferdinand came back for her with the carryall. After she had gone, the old farmer said gruffly to Colette:

"Your sister has made away with your fortune for you. I want you to understand that she shall never have any part of mine."

"Father," said Colette, "you will be just and merciful to her when the time comes, I know. You will remember that Renee is your only grandchild."

"You are my only child—my only heir."

"But I cannot accept that."

"Hush! Hush, I say."

Over in the old chateau, the four, father, mother, son and daughter-in-law, began to count the days which still remained to them before the date of their final dislodgement. The marchioness, frightened at the somber

despair painted on her husband's countenance, sought consolation in the hopes and promises of her children. But it was in vain for Renee to suggest their taking refuge in the home of her parents in Noutron, in vain for Paul to declare that he would go abroad and conquer fortune for them all, in vain the marchioness spoke of the goodness of God and of his never-ending pity and compassion—nothing that they could say or suggest had power to dissipate the dumb despair that had taken possession of the old marquis. A sad smile would come to his features as he listened to them, but there was no light, no hope in the look which accompanied it. He scarcely ate at all, never spoke, and slept but little. He became so emaciated that his clothing flapped about his long, gaunt limbs. He would pass from room to room of the big house without making the slightest noise, and with his long white beard rivaling the pallor of his countenance he reminded one for all the world of some ancestral ghost come out of his grave to patrol his former home and guard it against the advent of the Vandals who were seeking to despoil and destroy it.

Misfortune followed misfortune. The Mareuil ladies took this opportunity to enter a convent, taking their fortune with them, so that all hope of succor from that quarter was destroyed. The sale of the chateau and demesne had been expected to produce a large surplus over and above the amount needed to pay off the debts. But Maclard and old Leander had managed so shrewdly that this amount was reduced to the merest pittance.

For a time the family actually lived upon secret charity. Colette acted as purveyor and the marquis observed her one day delivering a hamper of provisions to the old gardener's wife. Some of these supplies came from the Chazeaus, but most from the Rouilhats, though quite without the knowledge of the land-speculator himself. This latter fact became also known to the poor old marquis and then his haughty soul revolted indeed. He had been able to stomach the bread that was sent to them from Renee's parents but that that came from his ancient peasant enemy, who was at last triumphing over him after a half century of threats, choked him. When

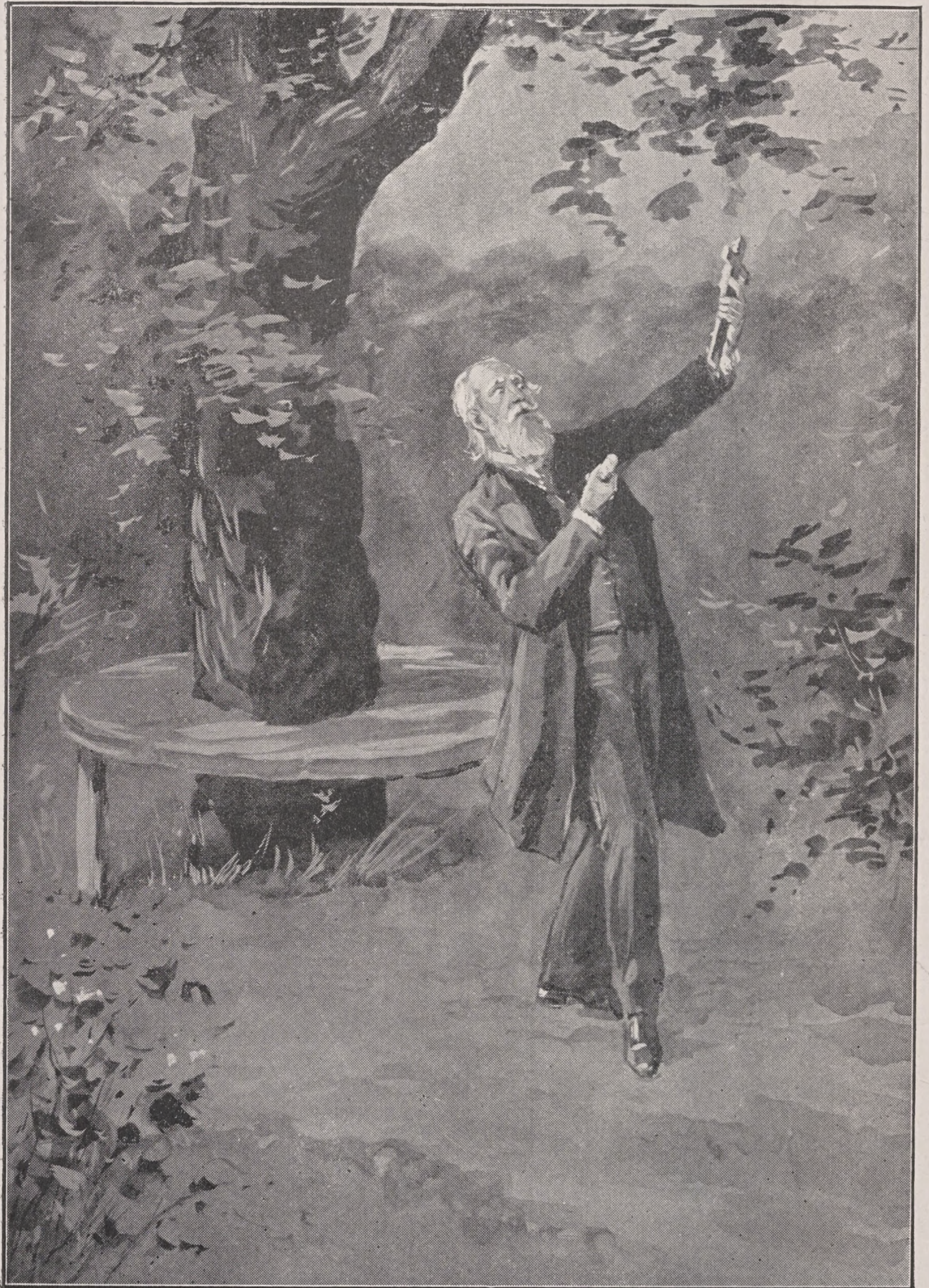
he learned whence it came he got up from the table and spat it out as if it had contained poison.

The thought of suicide never left him. At first he hoped his wife would join him but her religious scruples caused him to drop this idea. Besides, he argued to himself, a woman is more deserving of pity than a man and suffers less when she is the recipient of it. But he made up his mind to die himself. He would send the family away, set fire to the chateau and burn himself up with it, standing down there in the picture-gallery in the presence of the portraits of his ancestors.

This would be cheating no one, he argued, for it was a well-known fact that the demesne that surrounded the house was alone well worth the price given by those who had purchased castle and lands both.

But the old gentleman never found an opportunity to put this plan into execution. The family refused to move away from the chateau and he himself was kept under close surveillance.

Finally, one evening during a visit of the



"HE TOOK THE CRUCIFIX FROM HIS POCKET, WHICH HE REGARDED FIXEDLY."

Chazeaus, Madame Clorinde and Mademoiselle Dumontheil, the marquis all of a sudden seemed to come out of the fog of despair in which he had been groping for weeks. He became his old bright self again, talked and laughed with the others and even took an interest in the projects of his son for engaging in business abroad, which came up for discussion. So when the visitors took their leave nobody paid much attention to the fact that the old gentleman had gone for a walk in the park after the Chazeaus' carriage drove off. °

He walked up and down for several moments until finally he came to an alley bordered by large linden trees. Here he sat down upon a bench, and took a crucifix from his pocket, which he regarded fixedly while his lips moved in a rapid prayer. When this was finished, he kissed the figure of the Christ upon the cross, and drawing a dagger plunged it into his breast with so much force that the point of the blade broke off in his body. A second time he struck himself with the blunted weapon. Then he fell from the seat to the ground, but gathering his remaining force he

began to crawl toward one of the linden trees as if with the intention of dashing out his brains against its solid trunk. The gardener found him, some time later, lying there in the pathway. The old gentleman had fainted from loss of blood. He was carried into the house and the doctor, the priest, and some sisters of charity hastily summoned. Doctor Bordesoule, the leading physician of the vicinage, gave it as his opinion that the wound of the marquis was not mortal but that he would have to stay in bed for a fortnight, a month perhaps. Meanwhile, he would need the most careful nursing and during his convalescence he must have the best of nourishment to give his old frame strength to recover from the shock it had received. At the thought that he was going to become a still greater burden and expense upon the family of his son's wife, the poor old gentleman implored the physician to give him his quietus with some deadly drug. But what was the worst torture for the marquis to bear was the fact that his wife and son would now have to go to the purchaser of the chateau and beg him to put off the date of his entry.

About this time Monsieur Leander brought home to dinner with him one day Monsieur Edmond Lagarde, the notary of Piegnt, of whom mention has been made. He was a good-looking young man with a swarthy complexion, brown, curling mustache, and pleasant-looking blue eyes. He had just been admitted to the bar at Bordeaux, had bought out a business and was the candidate proposed by the old farmer for the hand of his adopted daughter.

Edmond was an enthusiastic wooer and Colette soon found herself becoming interested in him. But she persisted in her refusal to give any satisfactory answer to his proposal.

"I tell you," urged old Leander, "he's the best match there is in the department of the Dordogne."

"He is an excellent young man," added Madame Honorine.

"Do make up your mind to have him, Colette."

"That's a dear!"

"He worships the ground you walk upon!"

"You will be very happy as his wife."

"I tell you," was the steady reply of the young woman to all these urgings, "that as long as my sister is suffering as she is I will not marry. I would not, I could not be happy."

Monsieur Lagarde, puzzled by the strange conduct of the young girl, who seemed to care for him and yet repulsed him persistently, was unremitting in his attentions. Finally, one day, she told him how she felt. With the tears standing in her fine eyes, she told him that while she would be proud and glad to become his wife, she could never bring herself to despoil her father's wife and daughter of what was justly theirs. She never would permit her adopted parents to do for her what they proposed, which was nothing less than to give her half their property on her marriage and the remainder on their decease, with the condition attached that she should never alienate it or any part of it.

"Am I right or not?" she asked, in conclusion.

"You are right!" exclaimed the lover, "and if your parents do not yield I am the most

miserable of men. For I must sustain you in the very decision that keeps you from me. And I love you and revere you more than ever for making it."

Monsieur Lagarde went to the old people and did his best to turn them from their purpose. He told them that he did not want their fortune but only Colette. Their daughter, granddaughter and great-grandson were entitled to at least one-half of the estate. But the old man was obdurate and his wife sided with him.

"You are talking foolishly, Monsieur Lagarde," said Monsieur Rouilhat. "But you will come to your senses before long and so will Colette."

Meanwhile, he continued making his arrangements for the demolition of the chateau. He met, at the village inn, almost nightly, a number of the other peasant-farmers of the country-side, who were interested in the matter as future purchasers of the building materials which would result therefrom and possibly also of the demesne. Amidst many potations the values of these were dis-

cussed and wrangled over and Leander was never weary of repeating the phrase which had now become almost as famous among his neighbors as the "delenda est Carthago" of Cato became at Rome just before the third Punic war.

"We'll have the old barracks down as soon as the marquis gets well," he would say, with a grin.

One night, as he was entering the house after spending the evening at the inn, Colette met him in the hallway:

"You know what you are doing is wrong," she said to him, looking up at him with the steadfast look on her face which the old man adored, "since you conceal yourself at the inn while you do it."

"I conceal myself! Humph! What for, I should like to know? Do I owe any one anything? Or have I robbed any one?"

He went into the sitting-room and threw himself on a big easy-chair. Colette knelt at his side.

"Father," she said, "you are ruining my life. You have heard what Monsieur Lagarde says.

He agrees with me entirely. Oh, be good to me. Be generous to me. You know you made an enormous sum by that forced sale of the chateau. The lands alone are worth what you gave for all. Leave the chateau to—"

"The Bressieres? Girl, you are mad."

"No. But to Renee, to your granddaughter. That will be different."

"Nonsense, nonsense, my dear."

Then he stood up suddenly and seizing the wrists of the young girl who still knelt before him, he exclaimed, passionately:

"Unhappy girl, do you know what you are asking? Do you know that for fifty years I have been waiting for that chateau, that I have toiled and struggled and suffered so that I might one day possess it and tear it down? Do you not see that those heavy walls and those haughty turrets weigh me to the earth, that while that house stands I cannot breathe, eat, sleep or live? When I look at it my lungs refuse their office, and I suffocate. When it is gone our house will be the queen and I the king of the whole country-side!"

"Are you not so now?"

"No, daughter, no. What would my neighbors say if they saw me hesitate—I who laughed them to scorn, and preached to them of their duties and their rights, of the principles of '89, of the Code, of the law, on that day years ago when this fellow Paul was destroying their vines with his horses and hounds and threatened them with his gun for protesting. What would they say of old Leander then? No, Colette, I will do anything else that you wish, but not that, not that. Never! Do you hear, never!"

"Father!"

"Leave me, I say."

CHAPTER XV

In spite of the care lavished upon their patient by Doctor Bordesoule, the Bressieres ladies and Paul, he mended very slowly. The disordered physical state of the old man was aggravated by the mental and moral suffering which continued to harass him. The healing of the wound became a very difficult thing to accomplish on account of the feverish and nervous attacks to which the patient was constantly subject. One day Colette came and offered her services as a nurse. They were thankfully accepted by the old marchioness and Renee who were nearly worn out by their constant watching. Presently it became evident that the marquis preferred her ministrations to those of his wife and daughter-in-law. Soon he got so that he would not let any one touch his bandages but his new nurse. About this time, when her nights were all passed at the bedside of the aged marquis and her days

were all spent in combating the prejudices of her adopted father and mother, Colette began to keep a diary from which the author has taken the liberty of making the following extracts:

January 25, 1881.

It was three o'clock this morning and snowing hard when I left the chateau. Meville, the gardener's wife, walked home with me. The light from the lantern she carried seemed to turn the snowy road to a golden hue as we passed along. Beyond its reach everything was a dead white—the sky, the river, the land. At the four corners of La Belle-terrie, the big iron cross reared itself in the midst of the white landscape, like a great black giant with outstretched arms. When I got home I walked quietly up the yard to the house with our two big watch-dogs on either side of me, licking my hands. Monsieur Leander was waiting for me in the hallway. "You bad girl," he exclaimed, "do you want to kill yourself?" Madame Honorine was in the kitchen and made me drink a cup of hot

milk before I went to bed. How the dear old things did expostulate with me for being kind-hearted!

January 27.

The marquis is a little better. Paul has made up his mind to seek his fortune abroad. Renee wants to go with her husband but he thinks she will not be able to bear the hardships of the life he will have to lead. So he will go alone.

January 28.

Edmond Lagarde passed to-day at Saint-Front. What a noble nature it is! The better I know him the more I appreciate this fact and the prouder I feel that I shall one day be his wife. Alas! though, how often our hopes fail of realization!

January 30.

To-day I went to Noutron and brought my sister's little boy out to visit his grandparents. Once, while the little fellow was sitting in Monsieur Rouilhat's lap playing with his long

beard, I tried to lead the conversation in the direction of the poor people up at the chateau. But Monsieur Leander was perverse and would not listen to me.

February 1.

Madame Anna is preparing an apartment for the marquis and marchioness at her house in Noutron. There will be a sitting-room and two bed-chambers overlooking the street. They are being painted, carpeted and furnished all new. Assuredly the Bressieres are going to want for nothing but I dread to think of the day when it will become necessary for the old gentleman to leave the chateau.

February 6.

Yesterday Paul sailed from Havre for Rio Janeiro. None of his former city friends would have recognized their old companion in the quiet, determined-looking man. May God protect him! Now that he is gone I must be more devoted than before to my dear sister.

February 10.

To-day Monsieur Rouilhat went to Piegnt where there is a fair. On his return he came to me and declared that I was ruining the life of Monsieur Lagarde. Is it my fault? Do your own duty, father, to your granddaughter and those poor gentle-people at the chateau. Then you may call upon me to do what you conceive to be mine with respect to Edmond and I will respond willingly.

February 12.

The sick man to-day tried to get out of bed and walk about his chamber. As a consequence he suffered a relapse. His fever increased seriously. Doctor Bordesoule was sent for. When he came away from the chateau he came to our house. He is a cousin of Edmond and he came to urge me to consent to marry him at once. When he found that I would not yield he became rather severe, I thought, upon what he called my Quixotism. But I cannot yield. Maybe the doctor will now join me in working to overcome the determination of Monsieur Leander. He is very fond of his cousin.

February 14.

Renee is becoming more and more amiable and helpful every day. Her character has changed for the better very perceptibly since her return from Paris. Her parents and the Bressieres perceive it. Her grandparents will recognize it in time and do their granddaughter justice.

February 17.

To-day is my birthday. I have been looking back upon my past life and, oh, with what a feeling of thankfulness! How those poor girls, born out of wedlock as I was, are to be pitied when they lose their mothers—if their fathers forget them!

February 18.

To-day is Mardi-gras. It has been a gloomy day without and within, though there was plenty to eat and to drink. Always before, we have had the Chazeau family and some other friends to dine with us. Nobody came to-day.

February 19.

After the carnival, the *Cendres!* But I have not been able to perceive any difference. Both are sorrowful, this year.

February 20.

Last Saturday as I was getting out of the carriage at Noutron, big Monsieur Laborde, who keeps the Cafe de la Rotonde and who is an old friend of papa's, met me. "Ah!" said he, "dear young lady, I remember the day your father got the telegram announcing your mother's death, sixteen years ago. A lot of us were on the balcony of my place when he went by from the court-house, with the dispatch fluttering in his hands. We thought he was distracted by some very bad news. Ah, well, well, it was a good thing for him he went to Paris to fetch you. You are an honor to him, Miss Colette, both because of your beauty and your goodness."

It makes me almost blush to put this down, but no one will see it, and I love to know that they all think kindly of me. Sometime, when I am down-hearted, I can turn to this entry and get consolation from it.

I met at Madame Anna's Monsieur Jean Tolbiac, the novelist, quite a young man, a native of Noutron, who was down from Paris on a visit to his family. During the course of the conversation Madame Anna asked him: "Why do you never write a story, sir, that every one can read, even young girls?" Monsieur Tolbiac was a little nettled, I thought, but he replied, laughingly: "Madame, young girls have never asked me to write that kind of a story." I thought it was a pretty clever retort. It made Madame Chazeau laugh heartily. Afterward there was a discussion about the modern young woman which interested me greatly. I heard what the mothers had to say on the subject and what were Monsieur Tolbiac's views. I am going to get some books and read up about it. I really want to know what we modern young women really are.

February 27.

Yesterday was Sunday and I spent all day finding out from books what the modern young woman is. I find that one class of ob-

servers have discovered that she is a species of monkey, who is to be taught to smile, to grimace and to make courtesies—a puppet without mind or soul. Other people think she is a problem, an equation, a being very difficult to understand or to analyze. Some of them believe the English or American system of education for women is superior to ours. They hold that she should have liberty, the right to flirt with young men if she chooses, and, at all events, to get acquainted with them and with herself before she marries. Others declare for the French plan and argue that the whole work of forming the daughter should be committed to the mother. I am not much of a philosopher, and less of a radical. In reading all these arguments founded upon so-called psychology and pathology it has seemed to me that they do not after all lead any-whither. I can't think of anything better for any one to do than to live the best life they know how—to love those who are about them and to make themselves worthy of being loved. It seems to me that all happiness and all goodness consists in this."

While Colette was thus committing her impressions to paper she was persistent in her prayers to her adopted father to take Renee into his good graces again. She waged uninterrupted warfare with him and she displayed the steadiest and most unflinching courage in the presence of the enemy. She felt that she was fighting for the peace and happiness of her entire world, and she never faltered and she never rested. Her weapons were caresses, smiles, kisses, cajoleries, the most artful flatteries, and of these ammunitions of war she appeared to possess arsenals that were practically exhaustless. The vain old farmer began to find himself much battered, withal. He quite knew himself to be in the right and was much amazed to perceive that he was gradually getting the worst of it. More than once he thought of capitulating, but the thought of what his neighbors would say held him back. He had always been a rough and uncompromising fighter and he was feared and respected in the country-side, accordingly. He was proud of the dominion he had obtained over the minds of his neigh-

bors. He wanted them to be afraid of him. The only thing he could think of that he was afraid of himself was that they should cease to fear him. "What would the neighbors say?" was therefore a serious conundrum to Monsieur Leander.

But he loved his adopted daughter with an intensity that his neighbors would have marveled at (had they understood it) even more than at any signs of lenity he might have exhibited. She dominated him absolutely, as spirit dominates matter. The hot, rebellious blood would boil up within him from time to time and he would silence her peremptorily. But the cool, calm, forceful influence would steal back upon him and take possession of him again. He yearned to yield to it, but dared not. In such a warfare, it was not difficult to determine which would be the conqueror in the long run.

The day arrived at last when, the marquis having completely recovered from his wound, it became necessary for the family to move away from the chateau. All their belongings were packed and Renee had come over to her

grand-father's house to say good-bye to Colette. The two sisters stood locked in each other's arms. Renee was crying bitterly. There was the same brave, steadfast look on the older sister's face as she glanced down upon the weeping countess. But she was white and there was a drawn look on her features as if she, too, suffered intensely.

"I have done my best, Renee," she was murmuring soothingly in the latter's ear. "I have not succeeded so far. But I shall—I shall."

The old farmer, pipe in mouth, was walking nervously up and down the room. Madame Honrine sat at the window, looking off at the landscape, with an expectant air upon her as though she were listening for something.

Presently the old man stopped in front of the two girls. His face was red and his manner confused.

"Colette," he said, abruptly, "the chateau of Saint-Front is your property."

She looked in his face, for a moment, attentively.

"May I do with it as I please?" she asked,

"Yes."

"Thank you, father."

The old man walked over to the window where his wife sat and raised the sash. Then he stuck his head out and, in a stentorian voice, roared:

"You people over there at the chateau can unpack your things, Colette says. Put the pictures back on the walls. Our portraits—mine and Honorine's—will never be hung up there, and may the devil take the whole business!"

CHAPTER XVI

But little remains to add. Colette married Edmond Lagarde. She is now the mother of a beautiful little girl, Lea, which is the diminutive of its godfather's name, Leander. The count has returned from Rio Janiero, rich, and now lives very happily with Renee and his parents in the old chateau.

One Sunday the Bressieres, the Rouilhats and the Lagardes were all invited to dine with the Chazeaus. After dinner, as it was a pleasant evening, all adjourned to the garden where coffee was served by old Margaret, who is still attached to the fortunes of the Chazeau family. Louis-Raymond and Lea, the children of the two sisters, played with each other in peace and harmony until presently little Lea, being seized with a desire for one of her cousin's toys and not being able to get him to give it to her, began to cry for it. The countess went to her and took her in her arms,

and learning what was the matter whispered something in the child's ear. Lea looked into her aunt's face for a moment and stopped crying; then she began playing again perfectly contented with her own toys.

"You seem to have put Lea under a spell, Renee," said Madame Lagarde, laughingly. "Tell us what incantation you whispered in her ear just now that made her cease crying so suddenly."

"First, I promised her a new doll if she would stop crying. But that had no effect. So then I whispered to her: 'Ask your mother for a little sister, darling. A sister is worth more than all the dollies in creation.'"

Renee, her eyes brimming with happy tears, turned to her mother, and continued:

"When father first told me I was going to have a little sister, you remember, mamma, I was four years old and I was a perverse little thing. I cried out, 'Oh, I'd rather have a doll that can talk.' I remember so well. Well, if he had given me my wish I should have lost or destroyed the doll in a few weeks or months at farthest. And here for twenty years Co-

lette's heart has been for me a perfect well-spring of blessings. But it is only these last years that I have known enough to stoop and drink."

The conversation was saved from drifting into an awkwardly sentimental channel by Paul, who looked up from a paper over which he had been carelessly glancing.

"Here's news!" he exclaimed. "What do you think? Verdac has been sent to Mazas prison for swindling."

"Hum!" said Monsieur Leander, "he has gone home at last, eh?"

A silence fell upon the group after this. The miserable ending of the ex-baron, bad as he had been, cast a temporary shadow over the happy family. Madame Chazeau and Colette presently began to walk up and down the garden path, with their arms about each other's waists. The old marquis, who was a great admirer of Balzac, regarded them complacently for a moment and was minded to quote the words of Jules Demarest:

"As women they are sublime: as mother and sister what language is capable of describing their virtues!"

"Bravo!" exclaimed Monsieur Leander, raising his big felt hat from his head, gallantly. Then he added, sententiously:

"If you are at a loss, monsieur the marquis, for words with which to describe my two daughters, Anna and Colette, let me aid you. They are saints on earth, but, all the same, they are visible, tangible, living and altogether human saints. Isn't that so, monsieur the marquis?"

"Quite true, Monsieur Rouilhat."

"Very good, then let's drink their healths."

THE END

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